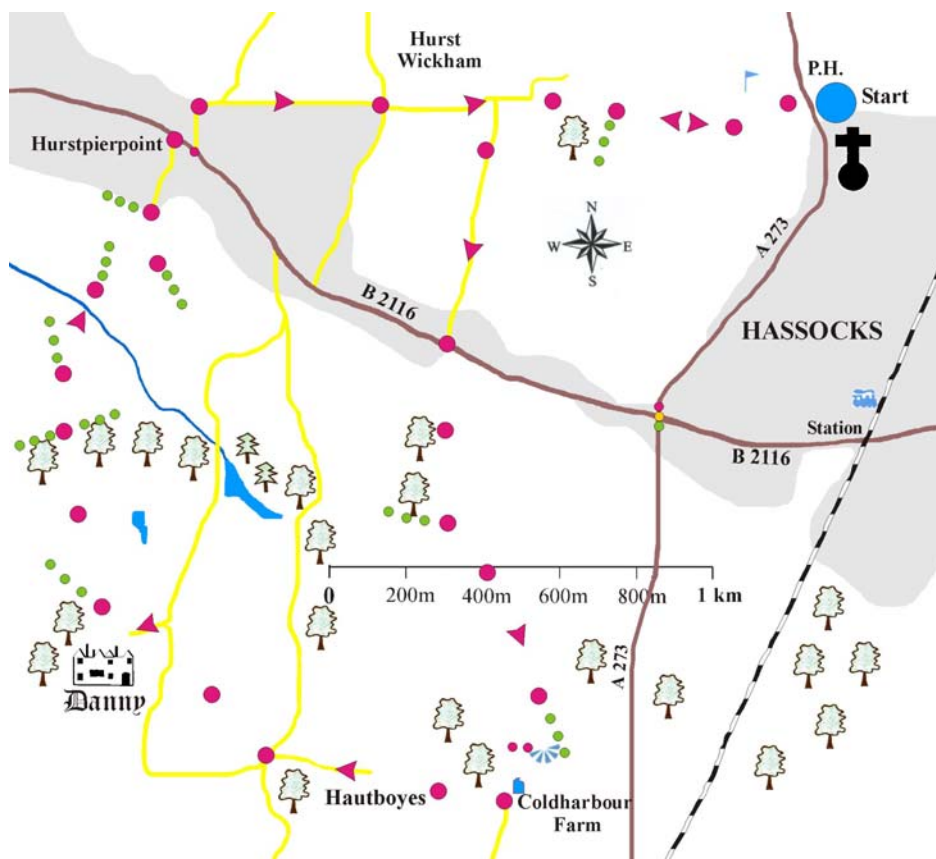


Hassocks

- Start & Finish:** The Friar's Oak Inn, just north of Hassocks on the A273. The car park is available to those carrying a copy of this walk, by kind permission.
Grid Ref.: TQ 303.165
- Distance:** 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles (7 $\frac{1}{2}$ kms). Allow 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours with stops.
- Terrain:** Typical low weald with mixed farming and small fields. Splendid Elizabethan manor house.
- Stile Count:** 14
- Toilets:** Railway station at Hassocks or see below.
- Refreshments:** The Friar's Oak Inn – open all day from 12 noon.



From the pub cross the main road to the footpath sign beneath the large oak tree. From here head to a gap in the fence to the left of the golf club. The fingerpost will lead you along the right of the 10th fairway and through a muddy gap in the hedge. Keeping to the right, follow the clear, broad track across the golf course to a gap leading into the wood. Through the gap continue straight ahead, ignoring the path to the left.

Hassocks is, by Sussex standards, a recent development having expanded in the mid 1800's with the arrival of the railway. It takes its name simply from nearby fields, which had coarse 'hassocky' grass.

This path broadens into a tarmac drive between houses. Ignore the next bridleway to the right and, as the drive becomes a private road, follow it to swing left around West Lodge. Walk over the small rise and down past 'Belmont' to the main road. Cross the B2116 carefully to the broad footpath

immediately opposite and continue heading in the same southerly direction. Soon cross a stile and kissing gate and follow the tree line on the right hand side of the field. At the end of the tree line ignore the footpath heading downhill to the right but instead continue ahead to cross a stile to the right of a metal gate. Now turn slightly left to head diagonally across the field.

From here there are good views to your right of Wolstonbury Hill, which is 675 ft. above sea level and is topped with an Iron Age hill fort dating from about 500 B.C. On the hillside straight ahead you can see Jack & Jill Windmills. Jack is the black one and is a tower mill, which was built here in 1866. It is probably best known as the location for the 1974 film 'The Black Mill', starring Michael Caine and Donald Pleasance.

Jill is quite different. She is a post mill, erected in Brighton in 1821 and later pulled over the downs on a trolley sledge by oxen to stand just below Jack. In a post mill the whole structure rotates around a central oak post to face the wind. They were often so well balanced that it was claimed the miller's daughter could turn a 150-ton mill single-handed!

Pass through a kissing gate and follow the fence line on the right hand side of the next field heading just to the right of the windmills. At the next stile, besides a missing gate, there is a choice of direction indicated by yellow arrows. You must take the right hand path across the field.

As you cross this field you can spot the entrance to the 1¼-mile long rail tunnel cutting through the South Downs, which opened to traffic on 20th September 1841. Sitting above the entrance, the tunnel-keeper's cottage is a bizarre, castellated building with arrow slits and battlemented turrets.

At the far side of the field a muddy stile will lead into a small wood, where the path twists about. Cross another stile and turn left to reach the buildings of Coldharbour Farm with its overgrown duck pond.

Just before the house, as you reach their gravel drive, there is a wooden gate to the right. Cross the stile besides it and follow the line of trees on your right at the bottom of the field. Several pinch-point type stiles will lead you through the field past Hautboyes Farm and eventually onto their drive. When you reach the minor public road ahead turn left and in less than 20 metres, before the Queen Victoria letterbox, turn right into a small copse. Emerge from this over a slippery plank bridge and stile into an open field and continue straight ahead. The magnificent Elizabethan manor house called 'Danny' will gradually come into view.

The unusual name is first seen in 1296 as 'Denye'. This area was once an island of firm ground surrounded by marsh – hence the original Saxon name, Denu e.g. meaning 'valley island or haven'.

Soon after the conquest it was recorded that Robert de Pierpoint held this manor. His family origins lay in Pierre Pont in Normandy - a name simply meaning 'stone bridge'. Robert was a powerful baron married to William the Conqueror's daughter. The manor and the park remained in the possession of his family for over 300 years – by which time their family name had become irrevocably attached to that of 'Hurst' and the nearby town became known as Hurst de Pierpoint.

In 1582 the house was sold to George Goring for £10,000 and he began rebuilding it into the splendid Elizabethan manor we see today. In less than a hundred years the 'new' house was sold to Peter Courthope, then High Sheriff of Sussex, and it remained in that family until 1702 when the heiress, Barbara Courthope, married one Henry Campion. They made Danny their home and began extensive alterations – the most noteworthy being the redesigning of the whole south face in early Georgian style with two stories. Danny was sold to the Country Houses Association in 1984 and later bought by Richard and Rachael Burrows who maintain it as serviced apartments for retired people and as a family business.

When you reach the entrance to the house follow the tarmac drive to the right of the house.

As you do so notice the evergreen 'Silk-Tassel Bush' with its exceptionally long & decorative catkins.

In just 50 metres, before reaching the outbuildings, turn right over the stile into a field. At the end of the hedge line on your left there is another plank bridge and stile with a choice of direction. Follow the right hand fingerpost to the far corner of the paddock. Continue straight over the next pinch point into the woods ahead. Pass through the woods and in 25 metres emerge over another plank bridge to a crossing path. Turn right over the stile and then immediately left to follow the fenceline, now on your left, heading away from the wood.

Continue in the same direction to follow the fence on your left. At the gate ahead there is again a choice of direction. Take the path to the right across the middle of an open field. As it curves gently right the path crosses a shallow stream on a simple footbridge.

The dominant tree here is the Common Alder, which enjoys just such moist soils besides rivers and brooks. It is a big tree, attaining a height of 30 metres or 100 feet and is easily recognised in the early spring by its catkins and by its woody cones in the autumn. Its yellowish-red wood has traditionally been used for the foundations of river bridges and the making of household matches.

Between the alder trees you will see large oaks with their huge trunks and deeply furrowed bark and, in the autumn, their familiar acorns. If you look carefully you will see a third species in this lovely curve of tall trees following the stream – that of the Common Ash, whose springy wood is traditionally used for tool handles.

In a further 75 metres you will meet a hedgeline with a stile besides a gate. Do not cross the stile but instead turn right staying inside the hedge, (the arm of the fingerpost may be missing). Pass through a pinch-point to the right of an iron gate and at the T-junction of paths turn left to walk slightly uphill. Walk past the converted barn to the end of a tarmac drive. Look straight ahead for a flight of four brick steps leading over a stile onto a steep grassy bank. Walk up and over the next stile into a twitten.

At the end of the twitten descend the steps carefully and slowly (keeping dogs on a lead) to cross the busy B 2116 again and turn right. In just a few metres turn left into St. George's Lane and follow this up to the church gate.

St. George's was built as a private chapel in 1852 by Col. Hannington whose son James became the first bishop of East Equatorial Africa. Tragically James was executed by order of Mwanga, the King of Uganda, in October 1885.

At this point the lane swings right and in a further 50 metres, by a house called 'Cepea', you must take the right fork following the footpath fingerpost onto a narrow tarmac track. Follow this pleasant cycleway to cross the next public road and continue ahead along a broader track ahead besides Hurst Wickham Close. The path soon narrows to pass between the drives to White Lodge & Hurst Wickham Rise. This again broadens into an avenue of trees and returns you to the lane by West Lodge where a left turn will see you retracing your outward route.

There is a nice view across the fields to your left now of Hurstpierpoint College Chapel. The college was founded in 1853 by Nathaniel Woodard and the splendid chapel completed a few years later. There are currently nearly 600 pupils attending the college, aged between 3 and 18.

When the lane swings left remember to keep straight ahead on the footpath sign to re-enter the golf course. Cross to the muddy gap in the hedge and walk to the right of the clubhouse to the welcoming sight of The Friar's Oak.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk

© 2008 Footprints of Sussex