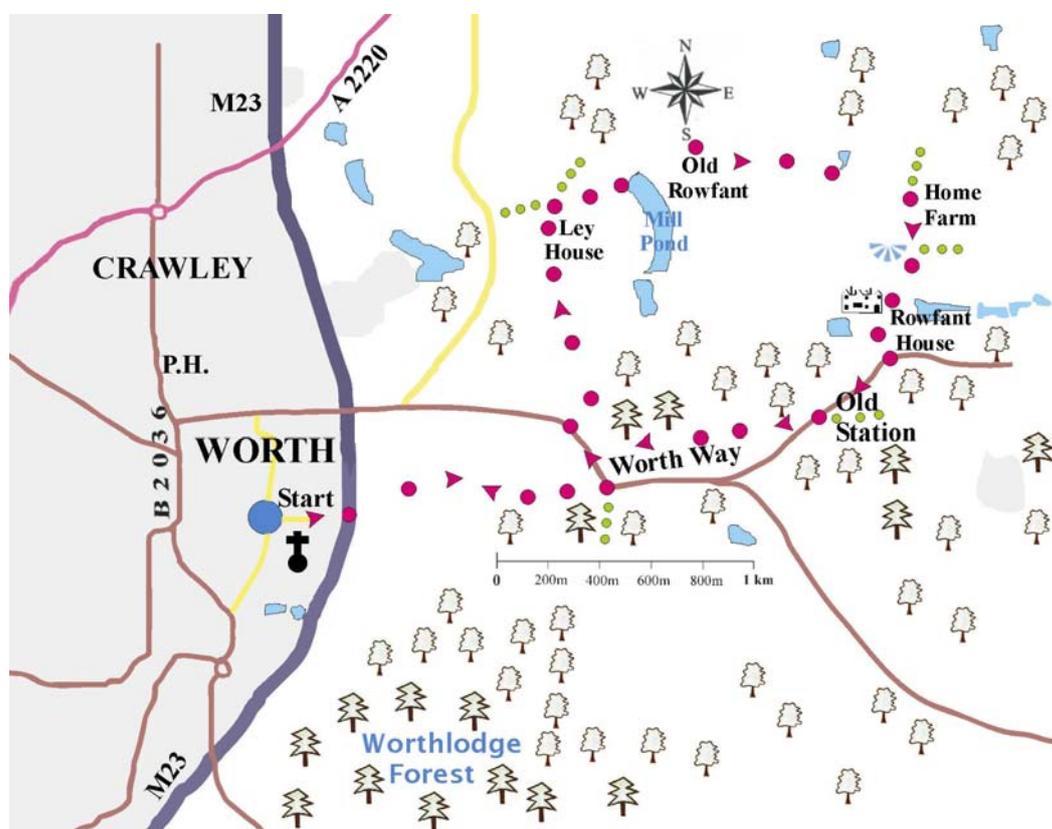


Worth

- Start & Finish:** Roadside parking in marked bays on Street Hill just off B 2036. Grid Ref : TQ 301.362.
- Distance:** 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles (7 $\frac{1}{2}$ kms). Allow 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.
- Terrain:** An easy, level walk (with one muddy patch) visiting two beautiful buildings.
- Stile Count:** 3
- Toilets:** Pound Hill parade of shops (not Sundays) or see below.
- Refreshments:** The Hillside Inn on the B 2036 Balcombe Road, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of Worth Church.



After parking carefully in Street Hill walk upwards to its junction with Church Road and turn right towards Worth Church. After passing The Rectory and well before reaching the church itself turn half left along a broad track, where a notice informs you that this is the Worth Way. It soon crosses high above the motorway and away to the right the expanse of Worth Forest becomes apparent.

This forest was known in Saxon times as 'Anderida Weald' and at its heart, on a high clearing, Worth Church was built to dominate the then largest parish in all England. The Saxon Kings enjoyed hunting and this must have been a favourite place to bring honoured guests for a 'weekend break'.

Continue along the Worth Way and, after passing through Warren Lodge Farm, the forest comes up to meet the path, which soon reaches a wooden gate. Do not pass through the gate but instead turn left around the curved tarmac path besides the public road. Where the cycleway meets the road, leave the Worth Way by continuing straight ahead along the grass verge besides the road towards the sharp bend ahead.

Worth Way is a 7-mile trail, which connects with the Forest Way at East Grinstead to run right through to Groombridge in East Sussex. It is possible there to link up with the High Weald Landscape Trail and continue walking along beautiful uninterrupted paths all the way to Rye on the south coast. This process of 'linking-up' continues throughout the southeast and provides the country walker and cyclist with ever increasing opportunities for weekend breaks with, perhaps, a night spent away at a quiet B & B.

At the bend in the road look for a footpath fingerpost on the opposite side. Cross carefully and take the right hand track behind the old wooden gate (not the private drive to the left). In just 150 metres you must again look carefully for a turning to the left away from the main drive. Within 20m this will lead you to a stile besides a metal gate with a field ahead. Walk across the field between the fences – which may be a bit muddy in places!

At the far side of the field continue straight ahead between tall trees as the mud gives way to a pleasant farm track leading to Ley House. Pass the Woodpeckers Fishery car park and on reaching the farm turn right immediately after the first small building to reach the duck pond. After the pond the path goes right and left in front of grand Ley House and reaches a pleasant grassy triangle, where it meets a crossing footpath. Turn right along this tarmac drive which in 300m will lead to a beautiful hidden millpond with the much-restored buildings of Rowfant Mill to your left.

This is an ancient site and was originally an iron foundry. Remains of canon balls have been found in the grounds, perhaps some of those destined to greet the Spanish Armada in 1588! The later corn mill was recorded as being in use soon after that and continued well into this century. The 'race' of water was where the present drive runs down to the lower mill house and some of the original millstones are preserved in the drive.

Continue ahead now up the slight rise to reach Old Rowfant Cottages and turn right at the T-junction of paths. Passing the more modern house on the left, the track turns left and soon passes besides polo fields and beneath electricity pylons. At Home Farm there is a T-junction with the Sussex Border Path where we turn right again. Ignore the path left and continue heading south on a narrower path through the trees.

There are some fine beech trees here, which have slowly grown to their full height of 40 m (135 ft). They are a majestic feature of Sussex in both the spring, with their fresh green foliage, and in the autumn when their leaves have turned to that familiar golden bronze.

There is brief glimpse of a pretty lake to your left, before the path crosses over a stream to enter the grounds of Rowfant House. Turn right and then shortly left under the grand arch and admire the house now to your right.

It is essentially an Elizabethan manor house but with many additions and alterations through to the 19th century. Its own tranquil gardens extend to 22 acres and are designed in the style of Capability Brown. The house has had a colourful history with many distinguished visitors including a young Prince Philip in 1934 and later Sir Winston Churchill, who spent many reflective hours here during the Second World War. Since 1955 it has been under the care of the Latvian-Lutheran Church and is now used for a range of business and social events.

Follow the drive away from the house and the clearly marked fingerposts of the Border Path will lead you to the main road, besides Rowfant Lodge. Here we turn right and walk carefully along Wallage Lane for just 300 m. At the old Rowfant Railway Station we rejoin the Worth Way and swing right, away from the road.

There is an interesting notice board here reminding us of the history of this railway line opened in 1855. To travel by steam train from here to London took less than 1 hour and cost the princely sum of 2s 7d (13p). In the late 1950's the station yard was used to store jet aviation fuel – which was delivered to the newly opened Gatwick Airport by rail tanker.

This most pleasant track leads back to the main road besides Keepers Cottage where we carefully cross the road and retrace our steps along the Worth Way. In 15 minutes this leads back to the bridge over the motorway and soon afterwards to Church Road. A left turn here will provide a wonderful end to this walk - and indeed to the whole series of twelve walks - as we visit Worth Church.

It has rightly been called the finest church in all England. It is certainly the largest with Saxon foundations and who would say that it is not the most beautiful?

It is not for me to write about it – simply to ask you to go there and add your name to the estimated one million people who have entered its door in the last thousand years and been moved by what they have seen.

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

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