DISCOVERING BRITAIN

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Green and pleasant land

A self guided walk around Walsham le Willows in Suffolk

Explore a picturesque 1,000 year old Suffolk village
See charming cottages and spectacular rural scenery
Discover the surprising origins of village flora, fauna and farm life
Find out how international the English countryside can be

www.discoveringbritain.org

the stories of our landscapes discovered through walks

Contents

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This walk was originally created as part of Walk the World. Walk the World was part of Discovering Places, the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad campaign to inspire the UK to discover their local environment. Walk the World was delivered in partnership by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) with Discovering Places (The Heritage Alliance) and principally funded by the National Lottery through the Olympic Lottery Distributor. The digital and print maps used for Walk the World are licensed to RGS-IBG from Ordnance Survey.

Cover image: Barn Cottage © Rita Gardner

Green and pleasant land

Discover the worldwide stories of a Suffolk countryside village

The picturesque Suffolk village of Walsham le Willows can trace its history back over 1,000 years. The gentle rural landscape of farm fields, ancient hedges and country cottage gardens, fits many peoples' image of England as a green and pleasant land.

Yet beside their obvious charms, many of the rural villages that seem quaintly English are full of international stories. Walsham le Willows is a good example.

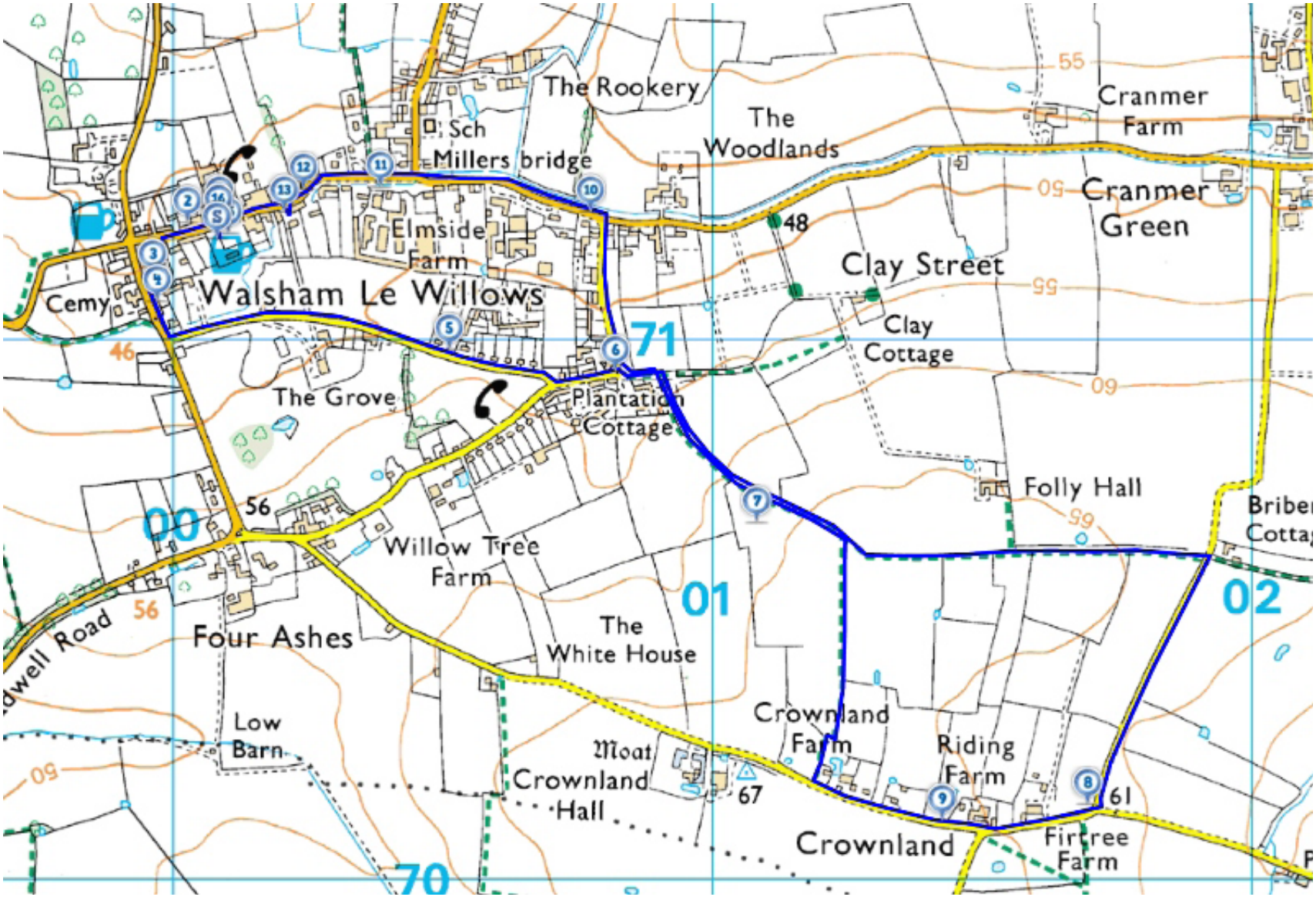
Riding Farm house
© Rita Gardner

The Avenue
© Rita Gardner

On this walk you can enjoy spectacular scenery and discover how an English village landscape can be brimming with international connections - from the trees by the roads to the crops in the fields, the goods in the shops to even the ground beneath your feet!

This walk was originally created as part of Walk the World, a Cultural Olympiad project that explored Britain's links with the 206 nations that took part at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Route overview

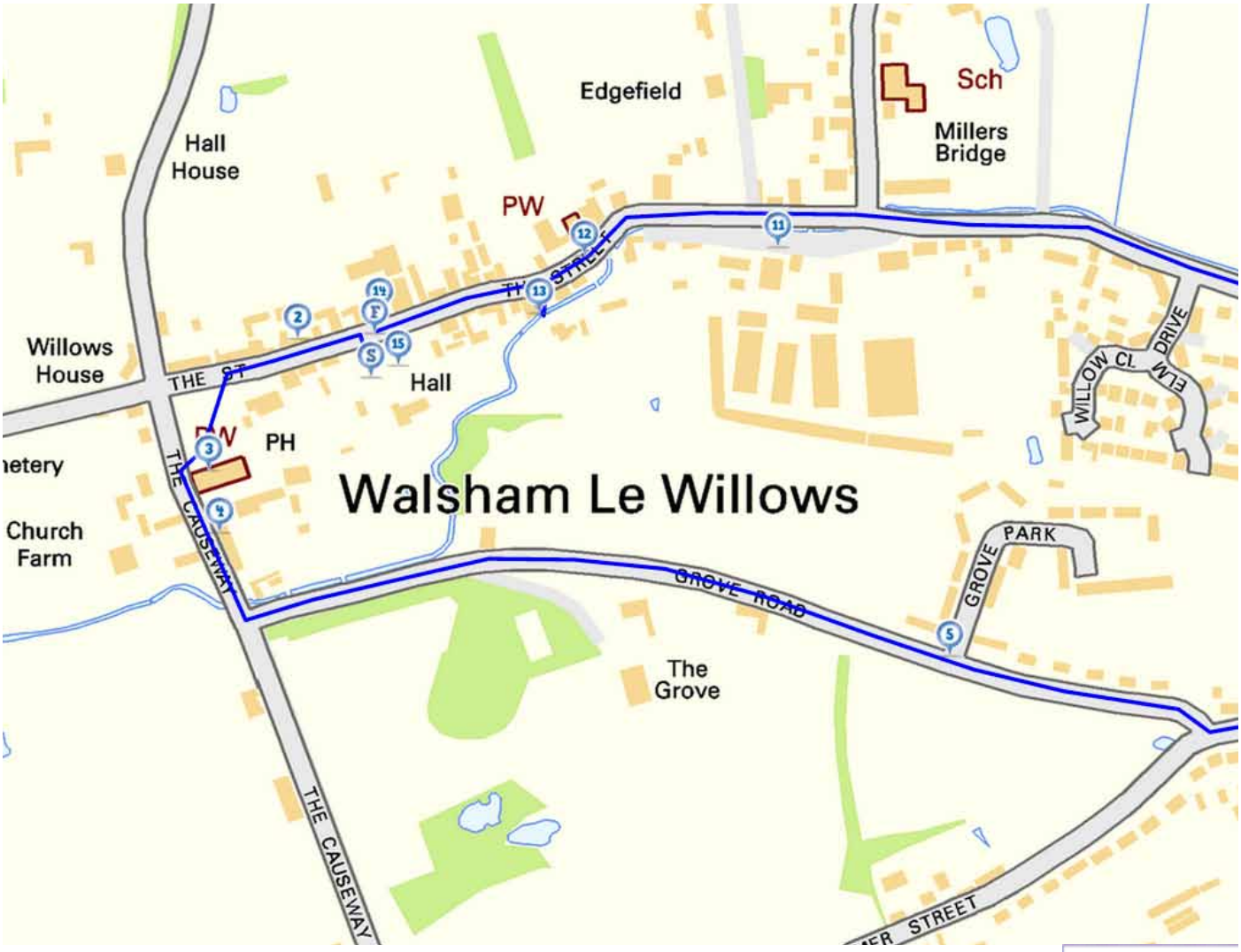


Practical information

Location	Walsham le Willows, Suffolk, East of England
Getting there	**Car -** Walsham le Willows is about 11 miles from Bury St Edmunds, Diss and Stowmarket. Access via the A143 to the north of the village or the A14 between Cambridge and Ipswich to the south of the village. There is some free parking outside the Village Hall. **Bus** - The route 338 services runs between Walsham and Bury St Edmunds railway station. There are bus stops in Walsham by the Six Bells pub, along The Street and on both Palmer Street and Townhouse Road. **Train** - The closest station to Walsham le Willows is Elmswell (5½ miles away). Elmswell station is on the line between Ipswich and Cambridge with services hourly during week days and every two hours on Sundays.
Start & finish point	Walsham le Willows Village Hall car park, IP31 3AZ
Distance	3 ½ miles
Need a shorter route?	There are two options to shorten the route if required. For a walk of around 2 miles Stops 8 and 9 can be missed out. To explore the village only, take the short cut along The Avenue (after Stop 4).
Level	**Gentle** - a mostly flat village and rural walk.

Terrain	Most of the walk is on pavements and paths. The rural paths can be muddy after rain. Stops 6-8 are on a mixture of narrow footpaths, tracks and small roads - ensure you have suitable footwear.
Suitable for	**Families** - family-friendly with plenty of sights for all ages **Wheelchairs & pushchairs** - An entirely step-free route **Dogs** - Must be kept on a lead especially on farm land
Refreshments	There are various food shops in the village. The Six Bells (Tel: 01359 259726) and The Blue Boar Inn (Tel: 01359 259168) both serve food. The Blue Boar has an evening restaurant, note though it is closed on Mondays.
Facilities	Customers can use the toilets in the two pubs.
Other info	**Walsham Open Gardens** festival is held each August Bank Holiday weekend. The event offers a chance to visit 32 village gardens plus enjoy live music, art and craft exhibitions, refreshments and a village market. Open 11am-6pm.
Places to visit	St Edmundsbury Cathedral can be found in nearby Bury St. Edmunds (13 miles from Walsham-le-Willows), open daily from 8.30am to 6pm.
Tourist Information	The nearest is **Mid Suffolk Tourist Information Centre** in Stowmarket (around 11 miles from Walsham-le-Willows). Located at the Museum of East Anglian Life on Crowe Street, IP14 1DL. Tel: 01449 676800 Email: tic@midsuffolk.gov.uk

Start and end sections of the route



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Stopping points

S. Walsham Village Hall car park, The Street

2. Barn Cottage, The Street

3. St Mary's Church, The Causeway

4. Gardens along Grove Road

5. Grove Park

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12. Shops and Congregational Church, The Street

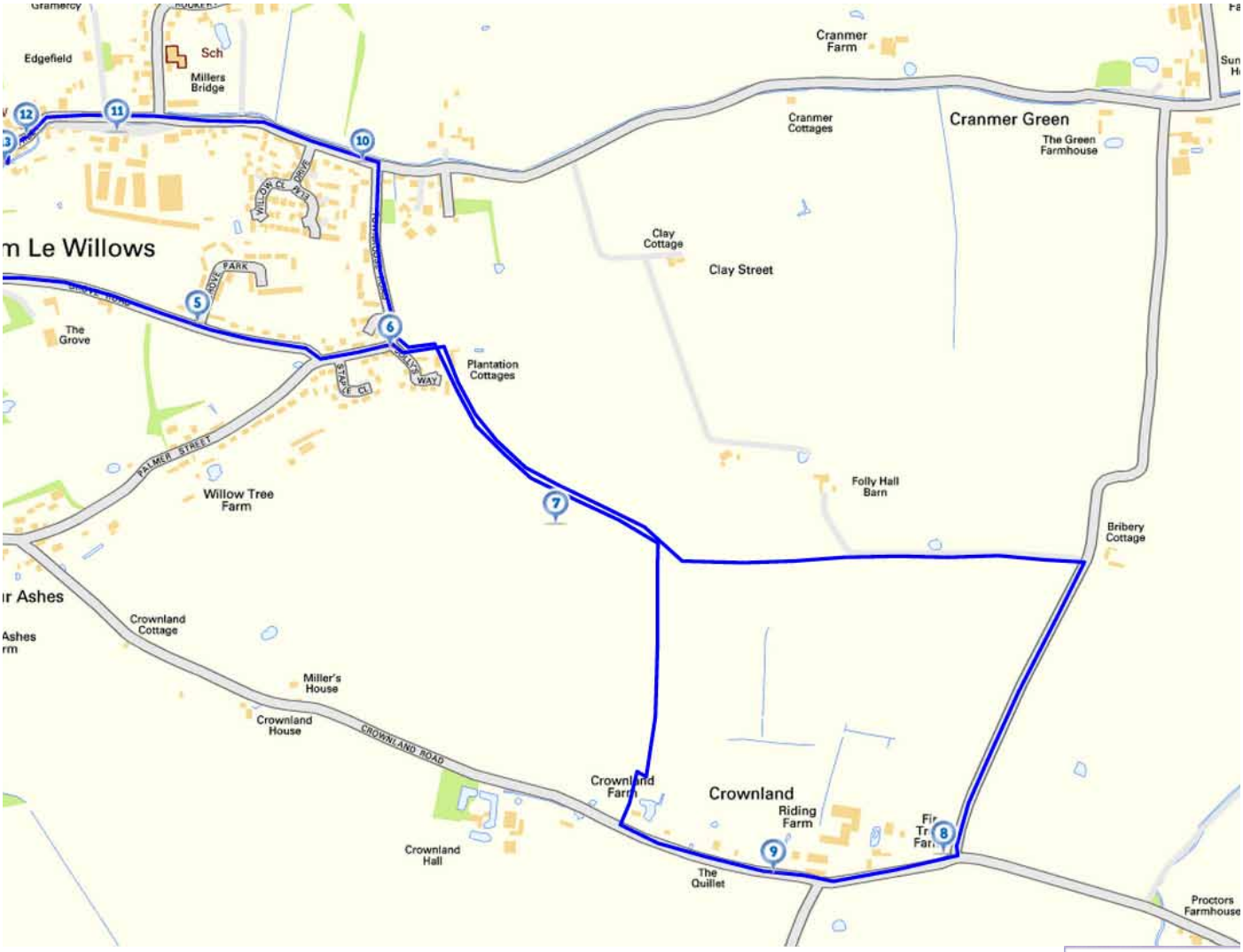
13. The Avenue

14. The White House and Willow Cottage, The Street

15. Walsham bowling green

F. Walsham Village Hall car park, The Street

Middle section of the route



Stopping points

5. Grove Park
6. The Pound, Palmer Street / Townhouse Road
7. Mill Lane
8. Bribery Lane
9. Riding Farm and The Quillet
10. Birch tree plantation, The Street
11. Clarkes, The Street

1. Welcome to Walsham le Willows

Walsham Village Hall car park, The Street

This picturesque north Suffolk village can trace its history back over 1,000 years. Walsham is a Saxon name whose original form was probably Waeles-ham or 'ham of the Welsh' - ('ham' means homestead). The name probably relates to the Romano-British inhabitants who were there at the time of the Saxon invasion.

There are many villages like this across rural England. Walsham village and the gentle surrounding rural landscape of cultivated fields and hedges typifies many peoples' image of England as a green and pleasant land.

Church Street, Walsham le Willows
© Rita Gardner

Yet on this walk you can not only enjoy the scenery but see how much of the landscape that we consider ordinary and English has an extraordinary background. The village is full of historical and contemporary links with other countries around the world.

Mahonia japonica
© Rita Gardner

Thatch roofing
© Rita Gardner

Directions 1
Start from the village hall car park in the centre of the village. Leave the car park then turn left along the pavement, on to The Street. Stop in front of the first yellow cottage.

2. Curved tiles from flat lands

Barn Cottage, The Street

Most of the buildings we can see in Walsham today today date from the sixteenth century or later. A good example is Barn Cottage. With its golden coloured render nestling under an orange clay tiled roof, Barn Cottage is a typical local house. In common with more than 60 of the village houses, beneath the smooth render coating lies a medieval timber frame.

What could possibly not be English about Barn Cottage? Its original mullion windows – visible on the right hand side at first floor level – are certainly local. Once they would have been open to the weather, with no glass and only wooden shutters on the outside for protection. Even the balls of box hedge by the front door are native to southern England.

Look up though and you will see pantiles, S-shaped tiles that rest on each other in layers along the roof. Pantiles were one of the first roof tile designs to be produced, starting in the fourteenth century. They are otherwise known as 'Dutch roof tiles' because they were originally made in the Netherlands.

Barn Cottage and its pantiles
© Rita Gardner

Pantiles were used to replace straw thatched roofs to reduce the risk of fire sweeping through towns and villages. Made by hand, the tiles were wind dried before being fired in outdoor kilns. The tiles made their way to east England as the ballast - or weight - in sailing ships. These ships came from the Netherlands to buy English wool. The ships loaded their cargoes of wool to trade in mainland Europe, leaving the tiles behind.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, eastern England was one of the richest regions in Britain because of the local wool trade. This wealth gave rise to guildhalls and other fine medieval, timber-framed buildings in many East Anglian towns.

Indeed, a little further along The Street you will see the white clapboarded exterior of what are today three separate cottages. In times gone by this building was the village Guildhall, built in this instance by three religious guilds, rather than wool guilds.

Interestingly, it was also later used as the village workhouse, a place where orphaned children and dependent women earned money from spinning.

The former Guildhall
© Rita Gardner

Directions 2
Continue up to the former Guildhall. Opposite the Guildhall, turn left into St Mary's Church. Stop in the churchyard.

3. In memoriam

St Mary's Church, The Causeway

This fine church, like many others in East Anglian villages, was built at the height of the region's prosperity. As we have already discovered, East Anglia's wealth was all due to sheep. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the area had the perfect conditions for rearing sheep and so the wool trade flourished.

St Mary's Church
© Rita Gardner

The structure of the church - including its roof, the roof painting and the (much-restored) wooden screen - all date from between 1400 and 1500. An earlier Norman (French) church existed on this site and one re-used stone from it can be seen in the north aisle of the present church.

The Norman church is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086. This extraordinarily detailed census of England was carried out after the Norman Conquest. As a result much land transferred into Norman ownership. As is often the case in country churches, more recent events that affected the village are well recorded. These include the migration of people to and from the village.

Colson family memorial, St Mary's Church
© Rita Gardner

As you approach the church, the monumental obelisk just in front of the main door is a vault for the Colson family. They travelled far and wide in the early twentieth century. One member – Lucy N. Paul Bigelow – was a US citizen when she died in 1924. Another – Jabez Colson - died in 1903 in Gotha, in Germany.

Perhaps the most moving memorial is inside the church on the first pillar as you enter. Here the names of the 34 residents of the village who lost their lives in the First World War are recorded in neat handwriting, together with the 5 old boys of the village's Victorian waif and stray home who also died.

All were members of the British Expeditionary Forces. They are recorded as having died in Ypres in France, Gallipoli in Turkey, Giessen in Germany as a prisoner of war and, surprisingly, in Rio de Janiero in Brazil.

The brass plaque beside the door records the tragic story of a single local family. Brothers Edward and Laurence Clump both died in France in 1918, just four months apart.

Before you leave the church, look upwards at the intricately carved oak tie beams that help to hold the two walls together and support the roof. They are a magnificent reminder of the wealth of the church and of the area in the 1400s.

St Mary's Church war memorials
© Rita Gardner

St Mary's Church graveyard
© Rita Gardner

Directions 3
When you are ready leave the church through the gates and turn left onto the pavement. Proceed left and pause in front of the two white houses on the left, looking at their front gardens.

4. An international grove

Gardens along Grove Road

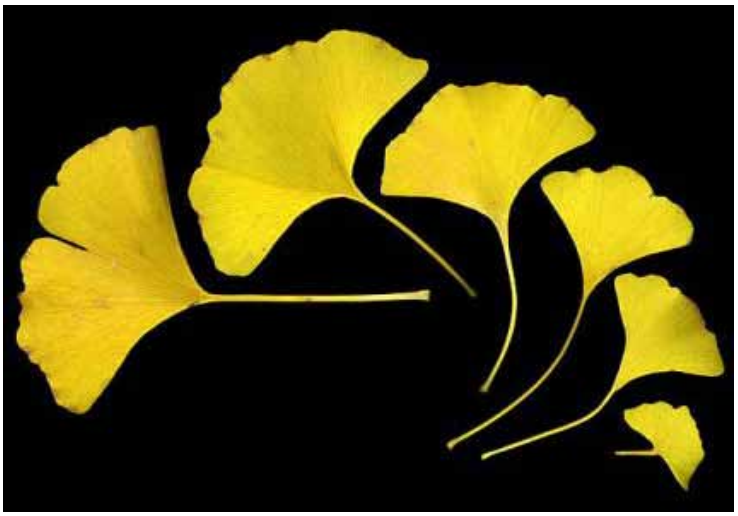
A glimpse into the narrow, richly planted front gardens of these two houses reveals a wonderful assortment of plants and trees. Many of them originated on the other side of the world; their seeds were brought to Britain by eighteenth and nineteenth century plant hunters.

Prior's Cottage
© Rita Gardner

The first house is Prior's Cottage. Draped over the entrance gate is wisteria. Wisteria is a native of Guangzhou in China. Seeds were first brought back to Britain by Captain Welbank in 1816 and three years later the first flowering wisteria appeared in the United Kingdom.

A magnolia tree and rose bushes are there too. Magnolias are an ancient group of plants that are pollinated by beetles because they evolved before bees. Their waxy strong flowers are designed to protect them from the beetles. Many types of magnolia, and roses, came originally from China and other parts of east and south Asia.

Directions 4a
Continue along the road. At the small bridge soon after turn left into The Grove. Walk about 75 metres down this small lane beside the stream.



Ginkgo Biloba leaves in autumn colours
© Joe Schneid, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

We can see even more exotic species in gardens along Grove Road. Some 100 metres along from Prior's Cottage on the left is a living fossil - the Ginkgo Biloba or Maidenhair tree. Look for its distinctive fan shaped leaves.

Fossil leaves similar to modern Ginkgo have been found in rocks that are 270 million years old. Then it was widespread but by 2 million years ago Ginkgos were only found in a small area of China. In the autumn the leaves turn a beautiful buttery yellow colour before falling.

There are too many other different plants to mention in the gardens along Grove Road. But to give you a feel of just where some of our typical garden plants originated from, first look out for the Horse Chestnut tree (Aesculus hippocastanum). They are native to mountains in northern Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Also look for the red berried Cotoneaster, many of which are native to the Himalayas and China. The striking blue grey fir and the Robinia tree (Robinia pseudacacia) meanwhile are native to south east United States.

More exotic trees on Grove Road; fir, gingko and cotoneaster
© Rita Gardner

Directions 4b
Continue along Grove Road, passing Brook House on your left, until you reach the black double gates on the right. Opposite the gates is a small pedestrian lane called The Avenue.

For a shorter route turn left now and head along the avenue of trees to the centre of Walsham village. Near the end of The Avenue, beside the white barrier gate, you will re-join the walk at Stop 13.

For the full walk, continue along Grove Road and stop by the first turn on the left.

5. The green revolution

Grove Park

Look carefully down Grove Park and you will be surprised by the house at the end. Its roof is adorned with solar panels – the green movement has reached Walsham!

Solar panels, Grove Park
© Rita Gardner

You can see two types of solar panel on the roof. On the right are solar thermal panels which use the sun's energy to heat water. On the left are photovoltaic cell panels - panels that produce electricity directly from sunlight.

The word 'photovoltaic' comes from a combination of the Greek word for light (phos) and Volta, the surname of Alessandro Volta. He was the Italian physicist who invented a forerunner to the battery and the unit of electrical force, the volt, is named after him.

Alessandro Volta
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The invention and manufacture of photovoltaic cells has involved scientists from across the world. The 'photovoltaic' process was recognised in 1839 by a French physicist, and the first working cell was invented in 1883 in America.

Further innovations were made by Russian and German scientists. When Albert Einstein received the Nobel Prize in 1921 it was in part for explaining the theory behind the photoelectric effect.

Today photovoltaic panels are made mostly in Japan, Germany, China, Taiwan and the United States. China is by far the single largest producer and is increasing capacity. While Britain offers incentives for households to install photovoltaic panels, in 2005 Spain became the first country in the world to require their installation in all new buildings.

The more traditional solar water heating systems are now used widely throughout the world. They are particularly common in Greece, Turkey, Israel, Australia, Japan, Austria and China.

The technology and its introduction were triggered by oil fuel shortages in Israel in the 1950s and 1970s. In 1980 Israel was the first country to require most new homes to have solar water heaters. Today 85 per cent of households in Israel use solar thermal heating – the highest use per person in the world.

Solar panels close up
© Rita Gardner

The 'solar tree' - a group of solar panels - in Gleisdorf, Austria
© Anna Regelsberger, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Directions 5
Continue down Grove Road to its end, where there is a T-junction. Bear left here into Palmer Street. After about 100 metres you will reach a small brick compound on the corner of Palmer Street and Townhouse Road. Stop beside this compound.

6. Missing mouflon

The Pound, Palmer Street / Townhouse Road

This small, red brick compound known as The Pound would be easy to pass by unnoticed. But it is worth a look as very few parishes have one left and even fewer are in such good condition.

The Pound
© Rita Gardner

This pound is relatively 'new', built in 1819 when the last of the village's common land was enclosed into fields. Like earlier ones, it was used for holding stray animals - sheep or cattle - to stop them from damaging crops or gardens. Pounds were a necessity in a landscape where livestock or mixed farming was common.

The pound signifies the farming heritage of this rural and agricultural landscape in deepest north Suffolk. Today though, you will struggle to find sheep or cattle in the local area. Low milk prices, low meat prices and high labour costs in recent years spelled the end of most livestock farming. Today crops dominate the landscape, as do large farms. That would not have been the case even 40 years ago.

Wild Mouflon ram
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

While we are thinking about animals that have gone, it is worth finding out where they originally came from. Sheep look so very English, and yet most of them probably descend from the wild Mouflon - which is anything but.

Today Mouflon live in the Caucasus Mountains, spanning parts of Russia, Armenia, Georgia, Chechnya and Azerbaijan. Mouflon are also in north Iraq and northwest Iran. Originally the range stretched to Turkey, Ukraine and Bulgaria. As a valuable commodity supplying meat, milk, wool and skins, they were one of the first animals to be domesticated by humans.

Directions 6
Take the signed footpath track just past the Pound. Follow it to two footpath signs, just before the old pink cottage (Plantation Cottage). Take the right hand path, through the kissing gate and go up the hill following a thick hedge. Continue a short distance along this footpath at the edge of the field beside the hedge.

7. Global farming

Mill Lane

We are now on Mill Lane, or le Melnemere as it was in 1318. The narrow but distinct and smooth grassy edge to the field was once a wide green lane. It was used by horses and carts, and marked out by hedges and ditches on both sides.

Mill Field itself was the village's main open field in the fourteenth century. Today as far as you can see the surrounding fields will contain some combination of wheat, barley, sugar beet, beans and occasionally oilseed rape.

There is no specific viewpoint here but as you walk between the hedge and fields it has a classic East Anglian feel; gently undulating land and big, big skies. The hedgerow is estimated to be more than 700 years old from the wide range of different, mostly native, shrub and tree species it contains. Also you are surrounded by crops whose origins go back millennia in time, to the very earliest farmers in far distant lands.

Mill Lane
© Rita Gardner

Wheat is the commonest cereal crop grown in Britain. Its early cultivation from wild grasses began in the Middle East and was associated with early civilizations. Archaeological evidence shows different types of wheat were cultivated by Neolithic farmers in Jordan as early as 11,600 years ago and in Syria between 10,000 and 11,000 years ago.

Wheat arrived in Britain from the Middle East
© Rita Gardner

Cultivation spread outwards from about 10,000 years ago, reaching Greece, Cyprus and India around 8,500 years ago, Egypt around 8,000 years ago and Germany and Spain around 7,500 years ago.

The first recording of wheat cultivation reaching Britain was about 5,000 years ago. Repeated sowing, harvesting and selection by humans of the best seed grains has created plump, high yielding varieties on tough stems.

Barley, growing in Suffolk via ancient Egypt!
© Rita Gardner

Sugar beet was first cultivated in Poland
© Rita Gardner

Barley originated at roughly the same time in the same broad area. It was an early staple crop in Egypt. It was used for making bread and beer, and became the symbol of Upper Egypt.

In stark contrast, sugar beet is a much more modern crop. In the late 1700s beets were selectively bred for high sugar content in what is now modern day Poland. Industrial production was spurred by the British blockade of French ports in the Napoleonic wars. This prevented imports of sugar cane from French Caribbean colonies where production dominated, such as Martinique, Grenada, Haiti and Guadeloupe.

Directions 7 - When you reach the narrow tarmac lane – called Bribery Lane – turn right onto it and follow the road. Stop when you reach the end.

8. Apples and pears

Bribery Lane

Bribery Lane is not as old as Mill Lane, but it certainly existed in 1851 as a dirt track. Then it was called Market Lane. During that time many of the older farmhouses and cottages in this part of East Anglia traditionally gave over part of their garden to an orchard.

Just on the corner of Bribery Lane and Walsham Road is a recently planted group of dwarf plum, apple and pear trees – a new little orchard in the making. As you walk further down the road, look out for mature fruit trees in some of the gardens.

Walsham's newest orchard contains dwarf apple and pear trees
© Rita Gardner

Apples were thought to have been spread into Europe as seeds carried by traders along the famous central Asian route – the Silk Route. The domestic apple's wild ancestors still exist in mountainous regions of central Asia, in parts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Xinjiang in China. Some believe the apple was the first tree to be cultivated by humans. By selecting fruits for particular characteristics over thousands of years, humans have created more than 7,500 varieties worldwide – a simply stunning figure worth remembering when next visiting the supermarket!

Dwarf apples are thought to have been first discovered in Kazakhstan more than 2,300 years ago by Alexander the Great. He took them back to his home land of Macedonia (Greece), from where they may well have become the first source of dwarfing root stocks. Today, the type of root stock controls the ultimate height of the tree and different apple varieties are grafted onto the rootstocks for cultivation.

Pears also have an ancient story to tell. They have been cultivated since prehistoric times, and are recorded in Greek and Roman literature. Their earliest ancestor comes from western China. Plums have strong links with China too – their blossom is China's national flower.

Directions 8
Turn right onto the Westhorpe to Walsham Road, signposted 'Walsham 1 and Badwell Ash 2'. Continue for about 100 metres past Fir Tree Farm. Stop when you reach the next white house on the right, Riding Farm house, and its neighbour The Quillet.

9. Tobacco and a ban

Riding Farm and The Quillet

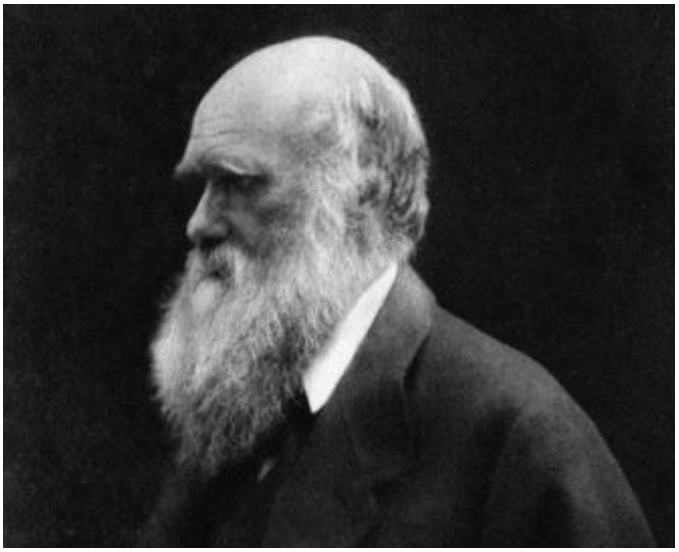
Hedges are the rural equivalent to the suburban fence. They provide privacy and an ornamental boundary. Both Riding Farm house and The Quillet have unusual front hedges.

Rhus typhinus, used by Native Americans for tobacco!
© Rita Gardner

Rising above the wall at Riding Farm house is a row of small Staghorn Sumach trees, or Rhus typhinus to give them their Latin name. With their distinctive leaf shapes, bright red fruit spikes in late summer, fiery autumn leaf colour and shapely winter branches, they give good value all year round in the garden. They are natives of eastern North America, especially southeast Canada and northeast United States, including the Appalachian Mountains.

Looking at these trees in the English countryside, it's amazing to think that the leaves and flowers of this type of plant were used by Native Americans. Added to tobacco it became the traditional smoking mixture.

Just next door is The Quillet, a farmhouse built in 1520. Its name means 'a medieval strip of land'. We are interested in the thick dark hedge outside. This is a type of Berberis shrub named Berberis Darwinii. It is named after Charles Darwin, the famous British biologist who developed the theory of evolution of species.



Charles Darwin (c.1868) and a shoot of the shrub named after him, Berberis Darwinii
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

In 1835 Darwin became the first western scientist to 'discover' the plant, during the famous voyage on HMS Beagle. Like many such western discoveries though, the plant had been well known to local indigenous people for a very long time.

Archaeologists have discovered that the berries were eaten thousands of years ago by Prehistoric people in Patagonia, South America. This gives us a strong clue to the native home of the plant – southern Chile and Argentina.

Sadly Berberis Darwinii has become a real pest in New Zealand, escaping from gardens and becoming an invasive weed. It is now banned from being sold and bred in that country.

Top: Charles Darwin's ship HMS Beagle at Tierra del Fuego (1830-36)
Above: Hand prints made by Patagonian people c.8000 BC,
Cueva de las Manos, Santa Cruz
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Directions 9

Continue a short distance further to the footpath sign on the right. Cross over the stile and follow the footpath across Mill Field. On the way try to imagine the teams of horses in years gone by ploughing this great open field divided into strips, and admire the view of Walsham village in its valley.

Once you reach the far side of the field and the 700 year old hedge, turn left onto Mill Lane footpath and retrace your steps back to the kissing gate. Turn left back to the Pound. Then turn right and walk all the way along Townhouse Road. At the end of Townhouse Road turn left onto the pavement. Stay on the left hand side and stop after about 30 metres.

10. A tale of two birches

Birch tree plantation, The Street

There are very many different varieties of birch trees across the world, and here we can compare two types. The larger of the two trees in this small patch of grass beside the footpath is a Silver Birch. The rough white and grey bark is very distinctive. As the tree ages the roughness becomes more apparent.

Just behind, in the hedgerow, you can see a much more slender and smooth trunk with a cream and copper-coloured, papery bark. This is one type of the Himalayan Birch, trees that were first described and identified in 1820 from specimens brought back to Britain from Nepal. In their native Himalayan mountains, they often occur as forest stands, with rhododendrons beneath them.

Himalayan Birches all have thin, shiny papery bark. It can be reddish brown, reddish white, or white, in colour. The bark has distinctive horizontal lenses within it. It also readily peels off in horizontal strips around the trunk, which is why it was used in India as a traditional source of paper from as early as the third century AD.

Himalayan and silver birches
© Rita Gardner

Used primarily for religious and other scripts, written typically in Sanskrit, birch bark 'paper' was especially common in Kashmir (northwest India). There it was used for more than 1300 years until paper as we would know it was introduced in the sixteenth century. Even today the bark is still used for writing sacred scripts that are worn as spiritual protection, as well as in more mundane ways for packaging, roof construction and bandages.

Directions 10
Continue along the pavement past across Elm Drive. When the pavement divides around a small stream take the left fork, up beside the builder's yard and some houses, keeping the stream on your right. You will soon come to the gates of Cygnet House on the left and then the gates of Clarke's of Walsham. Stop here.

11. Festive firs

Clarkes, The Street

We are now entering back into the heart of the village. In the mid-1800s Walsham was home to a multitude of different businesses and local craftsmen including a baker, brewer, cooper, gun-maker, maltster, milliner, plumber, rope-maker, saddler, shoemaker, smith, tailor, thatcher, wheelwright, and a striking mill.

Sadly none of that local craft survives today. But at Clarkes - one of the best known agricultural and builders' merchants in East Anglia – we can find a cornucopia of international connections.

Clarkes of Walsham gates
© Rita Gardner

Founded in the 1900s and still a family firm, Clarkes is the largest business and employer in Walsham. The goods it sells and the construction materials they use in their workshops are now imported from across the world.

One example is timber, which Clarkes import from Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia - sustainably sourced wherever possible. Among their timber products, Clarkes make barns and sheds using Norway spruce. This type of fir tree is very popular among timber merchants for its strength. Norway spruce is also used to make paper and is a popular choice for Christmas trees.

In fact the Norwegian government provide large spruce trees to the cities of London, Edinburgh, New York and Washington DC every Christmas as thanks for Allied support while Norway was occupied during the Second World War.

Directions 11
Continue along the pavement, past Bank House, looking at its garden plants as you pass by. Among them you will see Mahonia japonica with its bright yellow winter flowers – a native of northeast China – and Aucuba japonica, the spotted laurel native to Japan and China. Stop on the small bridge where the pavement rejoins the main road, Church Street, opposite Rolfe's of Walsham and the Congregational Church.

12. Body and soul food

Shops and Congregational Church, The Street

As we re-join the main road we can see some other village landmarks. The village is unusual, compared with many neighbouring settlements, in the range and quality of its independent shops, the local butcher - Rolfe's of Walsham - and the wine merchant next door but one - Wattisfield Wines.

A peek into either of them reminds us just how far away some of our foods come from. At Rolfe's are vegetables imported from South Africa and lamb from New Zealand.

Wattisfield Wines, The Street
© Rita Gardner

Wattisfield Wines stocks wines from many nations. Beside major wine producing countries such as Italy, France and Portugal, it is remarkable to think that in an English village shop we could find wines from Chile, Argentina, Switzerland, Slovenia, Hungary or even the Lebanon.

Between these shops is the Congregational church, a fine building dating from 1844 with a distinctive Italian classical façade and Greek Doric porch. The Congregational Church follows a Protestant Christian faith where each congregation governs its own church independently. The Congregational Movement was established in the sixteenth century as a dissenting – Nonconformist - church at the time of the reformation, when Henry VIII became head of the Protestant Church of England.

These English 'underground' churches and exiles from Holland provided a third of the 102 passengers on the Mayflower, which sailed from London in July 1620 for the United States. They became known as the Pilgrim Fathers and were the original founders of the strong Congregationalist movement in the northeastern United States today.

Directions 12
Continue along Church Street for about 60 metres until you reach a narrow pathway on the left beside Avenue House. This is The Avenue. Turn down The Avenue and stop beside the white barrier gate. **If you have taken the short walk**, you turned into the far end of The Avenue at Directions 4 and will need to walk up The Avenue until almost at the end.

13. English country garden?

The Avenue

From here we can see two delightful cottage gardens. One is a typically English garden full of perennials.

An English cottage garden
© Rita Gardner

On the opposite side of the Avenue though, we can see trees from across the world. Four of the trees - each from a different continent - are particularly striking.

The Rowan tree is full of red berries in late summer. The native lands of the Rowan, sometimes called the mountain ash, cover most of Europe.

The Indian Bean tree has large heart-shaped leaves and in late summer it is recognised by long hanging bean pods. Despite its name, the Indian Bean tree originates in the southeast United States, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Also look out for the blue-green leaves and smooth colourful bark of a Eucalyptus tree. The Eucalyptus is native to Australia. Its leaves are the staple diet of koala bears.

Indian Bean tree
© Rory Walsh

Colourful eucalyptus bark in Hawaii
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

A distinctive autumnal Maple leaf
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Clematis Armandii
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Look out as well for the finely pointed leaves of an ornamental Maple tree. The leaves are especially brightly coloured in autumn. Maples are the national plant of Canada and appear on the Canadian flag. Yet most maples originate in Asia, including many of the maple cultivars that we commonly see in our gardens in England.

There are nearly 130 species of Maple trees and shrubs worldwide. Nearly half of them are threatened by extinction in their native habitat but that does not include the European Maple tree – the Sycamore of Great Britain – which is still widely seen.

Staying with garden plants, turning left on The Street will bring you almost immediately opposite the Old Infant School. Around the front door is a vigorous evergreen climber – Clematis Armandii – which hails originally from China. And in the garden there is superb example of a larch tree. Many larches are native to Russian Siberia.

Directions 13
From The Avenue retrace your steps back to Church Street and continue towards the starting point in the Car Park. Stop at the bowling green, beside the wooden bench that is a memorial to Catherine Martineau. Look across the road to the White House and the adjacent pink painted Willow Cottage.

14. Thatched variety

The White House and Willow Cottage, The Street

The White House with its wheat thatch roof
© Rita Gardner

Willow Cottage's water reed thatch roof
© Rita Gardner

The White House and Willow Cottage both have traditional East Anglian thatch roofs. Until about 1800 AD there was little choice of roofing materials in many countryside areas apart from local vegetation. Thatch was light, available and cheap. A similar situation applies in many rural areas of developing countries today, where thatching with local plants is common.

In Britain thatch is now the most expensive roofing material and one of the shortest lived. Where clay tiles will last at least 100 years, thatch has a life of 25 to 50 years depending on the materials, its thickness, the roof angle, the expertise of the thatcher and of course the weather.

A thatcher building a straw roof (1949)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

To thatch a whole cottage roof takes two men up to three months; and the materials usually have to be specially grown or imported. The protective ridge of straw has to be replaced every 12 to 15 years.

So why do these two roofs look different?

The White House thatch is made of long stalks of wheat straw. It has a rounder, more 'blanket' like look, with the straw held in place by hazel sticks. To renew it, another layer is added on top.

These days, heritage varieties of wheat are specially grown and harvested in traditional ways for thatching - modern wheat varieties have short stalks and they are crushed by combine harvesters.

Willow Cottage has a roof of water reed. Applied in bundles with their ends facing outwards, the reeds give a smoother layer about 35 to 40cm thick. A straw ridge covers the weak join at the top.

A combine harvester at work
© Rita Gardner

Water reeds used in thatching
© Rita Gardner

Water reed roofs are rare outside East Anglia, as the reeds come originally from the fenlands in the region. But drainage of the fens, habitat destruction, and pollution from nitrate fertilisers that weakens the reed stems have all taken their toll.

These factors mean that 80 per cent of the water reeds are imported these days - from Poland, Turkey and China. How sad is that?

Directions 14
From the same point turn to look at the bowling green.

15. Bowled over

Walsham bowling green

Walsham is rightly proud of its lovely bowling green. The game of lawn bowls has a long history in England and Scotland, dating back to at least 1299. The game is also very popular in the former British colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Hong Kong. More recently it has been taken up in Japan, Denmark and Norway.

Most bowls are made today of modern, composite materials. Old ones, however, were carefully crafted by hand from hardwood; specifically from Lignum-vitae, the densest wood traded and one of a group of trees known as ironwoods.

A pair of lawn bowls balls behind a jack / kitty
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Lignum-vitae flower
© Cayabo, Flickr (CCL)

Lignum-vitae is a native tree of subtropical and tropical regions of the Americas. Its name originated probably in the Bahamas, and its flower is the national flower of Jamaica. Now on the endangered list of plants, it is no longer traded. The same wood was used to make police truncheons!

The bungalow to one side of the car park takes us to India! The word 'bungalow' is an Anglo-Indian term, introduced to the English language from the original Hindi word for a low building, 'bungla'. The word was anglicised to 'bungalow', describing the single storey colonial style home of senior Raj officials.

Directions 15
Walk the remaining few metres along the pavement to the car park for the final stop.

16. The world beneath our feet

Walsham Village Hall car park

Who would have thought that a three mile walk across classic East Anglian countryside would reveal links to more than 50 other nations, on six of the world's seven continents? We can find more international links right here in the ground beneath our feet.

Look at the ground of the car park and even the asphalt and white lines have a story to tell. Asphalt is made from distilling crude oil. Britain currently imports about half of its oil, with most imports coming from Norway.

Egyptian god Anubis attending a mummified body
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Before modern asphalt roads were paved with tar. Amazingly the first city to pave its streets was Baghdad in present-day Iraq in the eighth century AD! In ancient times asphalt was used in Pakistan, Iraq and Iran for building construction and waterproofing. In ancient Egypt, asphalt was used for embalming mummies!

A rutile crystal
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The white colour in the road markings is exotic too. The colouring comes from titanium dioxide pigment, which is extracted from the mineral rutile. Most rutile is mined in Australia; although India, South Africa and Eastern Europe also supply some and Sierra Leone has large reserves of it.

We often tend to think of globalisation as a modern phenomenon. Yet we have seen on this walk that links and dependencies between Britain and many other parts of the world can extend back hundreds, even thousands, of years.

Above all, behind things we often think of as symbolic of England's green and pleasant lands are influences from faraway places and very different cultures and environments. It does make you think - is there such a thing as classic English countryside?

Further information

Walsham le Willows village website
www.walsham-le-willows.org

The Blue Boar Inn
www.theblueboarwalsham.co.uk

Rolfes of Walsham
www.rolfesbutchers.co.uk

The Six Bells
www.walsham-le-willows.org/amenities/sixbells

St Mary's Parish Church
www.walsham-le-willows.org/churches/parish

Walsham Open Gardens
www.walshamopengardens.com

Walsham le Willows Sports Club
www.walshamlewillowssportsclub.com

Wattisfield Wines
www.wattisfieldwines.co.uk/index.html

Credits

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Big, big skies over Mill Field
© Rita Gardner

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