

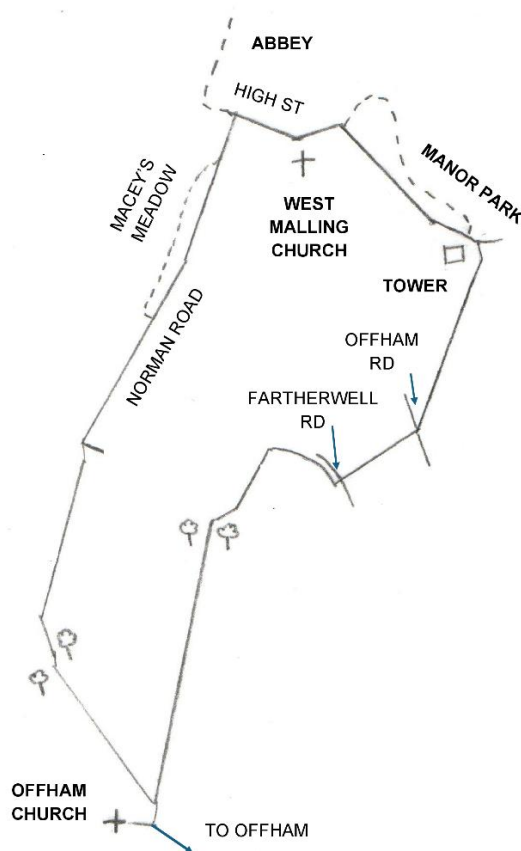
often portrayed fighting with a dragon. You can see him in the stained glass behind the altar.

St Michael's stands next to Bett's farm which grows salad crops. Many of those who harvest the salad leaves are seasonal workers, coming here from far away, leaving their families behind while they bring in the harvest. Pray for them as you leave Offham.

Heading back to West Malling

Retrace your steps and walk a short distance back up the same track you came down until you come to the end of the hedge on your left. Follow the track that leads diagonally to the left across the field, towards the wood. Walk through the woodland. Then keep going straight on towards West Malling (you will be able to see St Mary's steeple). At the end of the footpath, continue along Norman Road into the centre of West Malling. Detour through Macey's Meadow community orchard if you like – enter via the kissing gate opposite the end of Alma Road. This leads to the recreation ground, one of the oldest cricket grounds in England.

When you arrive back in the High Street, either turn right and return to the starting point at the church or take a detour to see **West Malling Abbey** – turn left, cross the road and head down Swan Street. The Abbey is home to a community of Anglican Benedictine Nuns and also houses St Augustine's theological college which trains Church of England ordinands, St Benedict's centre which provides courses on behalf of Rochester Diocese, and the Pilsdon Community, which offers hospitality to a small group of vulnerable adults and wayfarers. Like the church and St Leonard's Tower, the oldest parts of the Abbey date to shortly after the Norman Conquest. After Henry VIII closed all Religious Orders in 1538, the Abbey became a private house for several hundred years before returning to its roots as a place of prayer in the early 20th Century. The nuns hold all those who live around or visit West Malling daily in their prayers. Pray for them, as they pray for you!



For more detail of the route see Ordnance Survey Explorer map 148 or the OS map app, from all the usual app stores.

More about St Mary's West Malling

<https://kentdownsmalling.church/our-parishes/st-mary-the-virgin-west-malling/>

More about St Michael & All Angels, Offham

<https://kentdownsmalling.church/our-parishes/st-michael-all-angels-offham/>

Kent Downs and Malling Benefice

<https://kentdownsmalling.church/>

Rev Canon Anne Le Bas



A PILGRIM WALK FROM ST MARY'S, WEST MALLING, TO ST MICHAEL'S, OFFHAM

Pilgrimage is sometimes described as “a journey in search of itself”; its significance unfolds as we travel. This circular walk linking West Malling and Offham churches, part of the Kent Downs and Malling Team, is designed to help you walk mindfully through this beautiful and historic landscape. You don't have to be a believer to go on pilgrimage – it is for anyone who is prepared to open their eyes, ears, minds and hearts to what they might discover along the way.

A PILGRIM PRAYER

Pilgrim God, you have promised to travel with us every step of our way, and to welcome us at our journey's end. Bless our going out and our coming in this day and every day, that we may know your presence with us always. We thank you for the places we visit, and those who tend them. We thank you for those we travel with, whether in person or carried unseen in our hearts, and those we encounter as we walk. May we find Christ, our Way, our Truth and our Life in your beloved creation, in one another and in ourselves. **Amen**

What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? *Micah 6.8*

WALKING PRAYERFULLY

As you walk, stop now and then and use your senses.

- What can you see?
- What can you hear?
- What can you feel? (the sun, the wind, the ground beneath your feet?)
- What can you smell?
- What can you taste? (Don't eat anything you aren't absolutely sure is safe, of course, but this might include a picnic, or a blackberry from the hedgerow!)

Ask yourself:

What encourages and delights me?
What makes me sad or troubled?
What might God be saying to me?

DISTANCE: 3 ½ miles – about 1hr 30 – map overleaf.

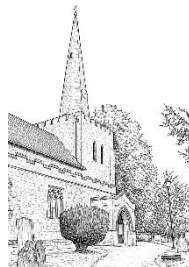
ACCESSIBILITY: There are no stiles on the route, but the ground is quite rough in places and can be muddy. Some paths are narrow, so this route is not accessible for wheelchairs/pushchairs.

FACILITIES:

Food and Drink: There are many pubs and cafés in West Malling. Offham village, ½ mile from the church, has a pub, and a café in Spadeworks plant nursery.

Toilets: Public toilets are located in King Street, West Malling, near the end of West Street.

START at St Mary's Church, at the top of West Malling High Street. The church was built in the 12th Century following the Norman Conquest. The tower and chancel are the oldest parts of the building. The nave was extensively damaged by a storm in the 18th century, and was rebuilt twice, once in the 1780s and then again in 1904. It is normally open during the day. Look out



for the coat of arms of James II hanging from the organ loft – his cypher is in the bottom corner. James II only reigned for three years, from 1685-1688, so it is rare to find his coat of arms in a church.

Walk up to the high altar and admire the tomb of Robert Brett (1566- 1620) and his second wife, Frances, complete with a skeletal reminder of mortality! Their only child, Henry, who died young, kneels at one end of the carved tomb. Brett was an MP during the reigns of both Queen Elizabeth I and James I. There are many other interesting stories on monuments and stained glass in the church.

Leaving the church, turn right out of the main doors and head towards the High Street, then turn right again and walk away from the town. You can either walk along the pavement or cross the road and take a detour along the lake through Manor Park Country Park; the path runs parallel to the road. On either route you will get a fine view of **Douce's Manor**. It was built around 1776 but was used during WW2 to house officers based at West Malling RAF base, (now Kings Hill). It has since been converted into private flats, but the bar which was created in the cellar during the war, known as the "Twitch Inn" because of the nervous twitches of the pilots who used it, has been preserved and is opened a few times a year for special visits. Keep going past the Manor and Halling Place until you reach St Leonard's Tower.

St Leonard's Tower was built around 1100. Little is known about it, other than that it was part of a bigger defensive structure, and that a chapel dedicated to St Leonard stood nearby. St Leonard of Noblac (died 559) was a Frankish hermit, and is the patron saint of prisoners, because of his ministry to those who were imprisoned.. His feast day is Nov 6. Might it be possible that this building once housed prisoners? No one knows, but it might prompt us to spare a thought or a prayer for those imprisoned today. The Ewell stream, which flows through West Malling rises just below the tower.

Just past the tower, turn right onto the footpath which leads up the slope on which the tower stands, and make your way towards Offham Road. Cross Offham Road and continue on the path (marked Restricted Byway) directly opposite, which leads to Fartherwell Road. Cross Fartherwell Road, and go through the gap in the hedge opposite. Turn right and follow the footpath around the edge of the field, until you come to a footpath sign directing you into the woodland. Take the path through the woods, until you come onto a broad farm track leading towards Offham. You will soon see Offham Church in the distance. Head straight for it!

St Michael and All Angels Church, Offham,

is normally open during the day. A place of worship is thought to have stood on this spot since at least 832 AD, when Aethelwulf, father of King Alfred the Great, gave the land to Canterbury Cathedral. The wooden Saxon building was probably replaced shortly after the Norman Conquest, and some part of that first rebuild remains in the shape of some distinctive "herringbone" stonework visible in the north wall. Most of the church is 13th and 14th century. There are information boards in the church which give more of its history, but don't miss looking through the two "hagioscopes" on either side of the chancel arch, which divides the area the congregation sits from the area where the altar stands. These would once have allowed priests celebrating Mass at side altars to coordinate their words and actions with the priest celebrating Mass at the high altar. It seems strange that there would be three altars in such a small church, but Medieval Christians believed that the more Masses that could be said the more effective they would be in helping those who were being prayed for!

St Michael is a common dedication for churches on hilltops because according to the Biblical book of Revelation, Michael was an Archangel who led God's army in the heavenly battle against evil. He is

