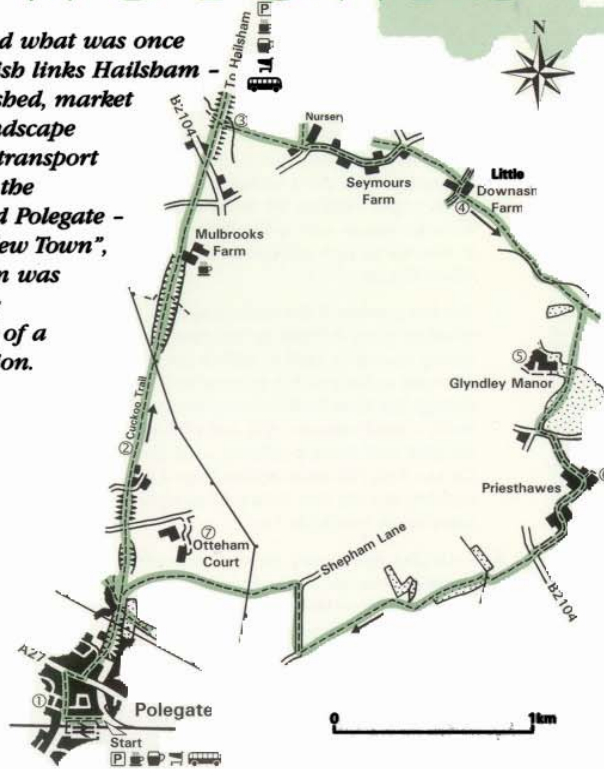




"A Tale of TWO TOWNS"

A walk around what was once one large parish links Hailsham - an old-established, market town on a landscape junction and transport route around the wetlands - and Polegate - a Victorian "New Town", whose position was defined by the establishment of a railway junction.



Length 6 Miles - 10 Kilometres
Approximately 4 hours - Grade 3

START - Polegate Station. (O.S. Explorer NGR 583048) An alternative start could be made at Hailsham

ACCESS - Car - Car park adjacent to station, High Street, Polegate
Bus - 17, 17A, 20, 21, 98, 126, 217, 218, 219, 281 and 752
Train - Polegate Station

PUBLIC TOILETS - Polegate High Street and Hailsham Vicarage Lane car park

REFRESHMENTS - Pubs at Polegate and Hailsham
- Cafes and Tea Rooms at Polegate and Hailsham
- Restaurants at Polegate and Hailsham

CAUTION - The route east of the Cuckoo Trail crosses a wetland area and may be flooded following wet weather.

6
Miles



"A Tale of TWO TOWNS"

- 1 Polegate is, in effect, a Victorian "new town". The decision to drive the railway from Brighton straight through to Hastings in 1846 and to provide branches to Hailsham and Eastbourne three years later, led to the establishment of a junction at Polegate. Around this a settlement grew up, its origins visible in the terraces of Victorian houses such as Brook Street and in road names such as Victoria Road and Albert Terrace.
- 2 The first portion of the route uses the trackbed of the Polegate to Hailsham railway, opened in 1849. In 1880 it was extended to Redgate Mill to provide a through line from Eastbourne to Tunbridge Wells. Closed between 1965 and 1968, the trackbed now forms a walkway called the Cuckoo Trail. The name derives from the tradition that the first cuckoo of spring is heard at the Heathfield Fair.
- 3 In contrast to Polegate, Hailsham is an old established market town which grew up at the junction between the arable, low weald area and the pasture lands of the Pevensey Levels. The town had several industries of which ropemaking was the most important and is still continued today, earning the town the nickname of the "string town". Brickmaking using the abundant clay has now vanished, as has the short lived barracks of 1803 - 1815, built to defend against the threatened Napoleonic invasion.
- 4 One thousand years ago the site of Little Downash Farm was a peninsula sticking out into an area of salt marsh flooded by the sea at high tide. The sea today is five or six miles away, indicating the extent of man's success in draining the area for pastureland.
- 5 The "ey" ending indicates that Glyndley was once an island in the estuary which is now the Pevensey Levels, a fact immediately apparent as it is approached on the walk.
- 6 1620 estate agency - "The mansion house (of Priestshawes) is fair and sumptuous newly built with freestone covered with Horsham stone. It consisteth of one fair garden with divers sorts of trees of good and principal fruit, one fair kitchen garden, one fair court and the garth or scite thereof consisteth also of divers convenient buildings and all offices thereto belonging with divers ponds well stocked with fish and a large warren well stocked with conies."
- 7 It is difficult to believe today but when Otteham abbey was founded in 1180 it was the only building in what is now Polegate parish. Indeed the site was chosen specifically for its seclusion. However others soon followed and within forty years the monks had relocated to Bayham Abbey near the Kent border. Today, some ruins can still be glimpsed amongst the more recent farm buildings.

6
Miles

