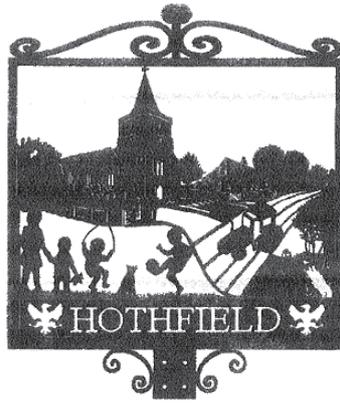


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Map legend:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Village hall | 7 The Tufton Oak |
| 2 Home Farm and lodges | 8 St Margaret's Church |
| 3 Waterfall and pumping station | 9 Ice House Field |
| 4 Second World War pill box | 10 High House |
| 5 Swinford Manor | 11 Tufton Bailiffhouse |
| 6 Remains of Hothfield Place | 12 Village school |
| | 13 Hothfield Heathlands |

If there are points of interest that you feel might be added to the walk, we would like to hear from you. Please email the Hothfield History Society at hothfieldmemories@hotmail.com



Hothfield Village Walk

The tradition of Beating the Bounds was once customary in every Parish and would take place on Ascension Day, when all the villagers would walk their Parish boundary, beating the waymarks with stripped wands of willow – a 15-mile walk in the case of Hothfield today. The walk suggested here is a slightly less ambitious 4 miles, some of which is over fields so appropriate footwear should be worn.

Refreshments: the Post Office shop. Parking: Hothfield village hall

The walk begins at **Hothfield village hall (1)**. The land on which it stands was given to the village by Sir Reginald Rootes (of Rootes Group cars). The hall was officially opened by Sir Reginald in 1975 and continues to serve the local community to this day.

Turn right into Park Drive and continue into Waterfall Road. Set in countryside of woods, fields and parkland, Hothfield is surrounded by interesting houses and farms including **Home Farm** on your left **(2)**, which would once have supplied produce for the Lord of the Manor. Originally called Park Farm, Home Farm was built in 1809 using bricks from the old Rectory faced with mathematical tiles, which were designed to look like brickwork. This was felt to be the best method for keeping water off a vertical surface (see sample by gate). In 1803 roofing tiles as well as bricks had to bear a tax but the mathematical tile – a mixture of the two – did not. Outer Gate Lodge, its central window bay curved like the ‘eyebrow’ of a thatched roof, was built in 1809 along with the farm; the Lodge opposite was built in 1913.

Seventy yards further on, to the left, is a track called Grafty Lane, the entrance to which, in the 1950s, was known as Lovers Gate. It led to Grafty Farm, situated by a stream, and continued as Yonse Lane to the main road. These lanes were part of the old Maidstone to Ashford road, which went past the Woolpack inn, across the common, to a sand pit behind the present bus stop, then on to Home Farm and beyond. An alternative route was made c.1797 and in 1810 it was altered again to form the pre-Rail Link A20, with a Toll House at Potters Corner.

During the Second World War scores of barrel-roofed Nissen huts were built in the village and on the common for use by the troops. When the war was over, the huts were used to house people during the post-war housing shortage. Ashford MP Bill Deedes campaigned for them to be demolished as a health hazard and eventually, in 1955, the occupants were re-housed. In the field after the spinney on the right, six huts, known as Home Farm

Camp, were built for use during the war, and were still occupied in 1949.

You will shortly come to a **waterfall** on your left **(3)**. This was made in 1851 by damming the stream(s) from the North Downs, which also created the fishpond, sometimes used as a boating lake. The road was still forded at this time with foot travellers crossing a bridge over the waterfall. In 1864 the road was made up, the river was bridged and the water was piped under it. The lake used to freeze over in winters past and skating parties were a familiar sight in the 1920s, when the banks would be lined with spectators. To the right of the waterfall is a pumping station, comprising an overshot waterwheel fed by a pipe from the raised level of the lake. This drove a twin-piston pump. The apparently clean water appears to come by pipe from springs higher up in the field opposite and is pumped back around the bridge. The ‘Manor’, a mansion house called Hothfield Place, and its kitchen gardens were amply supplied with water by this means.

Echoes of Second World War activity are to be found all around Hothfield. At the T-junction you will see a **Pill Box** ahead, an example of anti-invasion defences **(4)**. (For a short cut at this point, follow the Greensand Way to the right behind the Pill Box and rejoin the walk at **X**.) Turn right and continue along the road past West Lodge, at the estate boundary to **Godinton House**, a striking Jacobean manor with distinctive gables, set in parkland, which is well worth a visit.

Opposite West Lodge, 100 yards across the field, a Hurricane plane crashed on 29 October 1940, taking the top off a redwood tree. The pilot, Sgt Black, had baled out but unfortunately later died in hospital. The remains of the plane were dug out in 1988-90.

Further on, you will come to **Swinford Manor (5)** on your left, now a school but originally an Elizabethan yeoman’s house and one of the oldest in the Parish. The name Swinford may derive from ‘swineford’, suggesting



Left: Hothfield's picturesque waterfall (3), taken in 1901, with its rustic footbridge and, just behind it, the sluice gate.

Right: Hothfield Place in 1901, with its sweeping carriage drive, remnants of which are all that remains of this once impressive mansion house (6).

*Photos: courtesy of
www.francisfrith.com*



that there was once a ford across the River Stour so that pigs could cross. A Wealden hall house by design, the wings of Swinford Manor were added later as was the 19th-century porch with its shaped Dutch gable, which contains a cartouche of the Toke family, who lived at Godinton (Swinford was once the estate's Dower House). Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate from 1896 to 1913, rented the house from the Toke family and several of his works refer to this place, particularly 'The Garden that I Love' (1894). In the grounds is Alfred's Oak, reputedly the site of the first Parliament in England.

At the electricity sub station, take the footpath to your right. This leads through a field, over the Ashford Flood Alleviation scheme bund and across a stream via a narrow footbridge. Hothfield is the proud possessor of what was once the world's largest hydro-brake. Look right for a good view of the charred silhouette of Sgt Black's redwood tree and behind you for a view of Swinford Manor. Continue until the footpath meets the Greensand Way; then turn left towards the 13th-century Church of St Margaret. The Greensand Way is so-called because of the green-coloured mineral, glauconite, that is found throughout the area.

About 100 yards to your left, in the direction of the new dam, is Mansion Copse where you can still see the remains of wartime slit trenches. Just beyond the copse are vestiges of a carriage drive wall (6), all that remains of **Hothfield Place**. It was built in 1778-80, probably by the architect Samuel Wyatt, for Sackville Tufton, 8th Earl of Thanet. The Earl married Mary Sackville, sister of John, 3rd Duke of Dorset. Sackville and Dorset were famous patrons of Kent cricket. In due course, the Dorset family seat, Knole in Sevenoaks, passed to the Duke's daughter Elizabeth, who married George West, 5th Earl De La Warr. An inability to produce heirs down the male line meant that in 1845, the dukedom became extinct and the estates passed through Elizabeth to the West family (who assumed the additional surname of Sackville by Royal licence). The poet Vita Sackville-West was the daughter of the 3rd Baron Sackville. Prevented from inheriting Knole by laws of primogeniture, she acquired Sissinghurst Castle with her husband Harold Nicolson and created the beautiful gardens there.

In addition to the mansion house, there were farm buildings and stables. In the 1800s the 350-acre estate was almost self-sufficient; it also provided the village with its own train station and gas supply as well as a source of employment. Years later, Capt. the Hon. J.S.R. Tufton planted an oak tree, known as the **Tufton Oak (7)**, about 50 yards from the front drive of Hothfield Place, in the direction of the lake, to mark his safe return from South Africa on 11 September 1902 (presumably from the Second Boer War). It can be seen near the water trough, and is still growing.

But by 1954 Hothfield Place had fallen into a state of disrepair following its occupation by the army in the Second World War and bomb damage. Its then owner, Sir Reginald Rootes, had the original building demolished and a new red brick house built (this was Polla House, now the Hothfield Manor Centre for Acquired Brain Injury) but a number of the farm buildings still exist, albeit in redeveloped form.

Set high to the south of the village, the **Church (8)** has had a dramatic history. It was struck by lightning in 1598 and a large part of it burned to the ground. It was rebuilt in 1603 by Sir John Tufton and remained intact until the Battle of Britain in 1944. Eight 'doodlebugs' fell within the boundary of Hothfield and one hit a lime tree on the corner of the road by the churchyard. It exploded, damaging the roof and blowing out many of the stained-glass windows. Since restored, this little Church, built largely of Kentish ragstone with a shingle spire, contains a gem – the splendid 17th-century marble Tufton tomb – which can be seen through the north windows.

Follow the path past the west door of the Church and see if you can find two interesting headstones: one to James Gaunt, shepherd, who died in 1868, which is carved with a shepherd's crook and shears, and another to James Waters, gardener, who died in 1864, which is carved with a spade, rake, hoe and two groups of flowers.

As you walk down Church Lane towards the village you will pass what were once the walled kitchen gardens to Hothfield Place on your left and the gardener's house (now Garden House) to your right. Thanet House (originally called 'Little Hothfield'), opposite the entrance to Church Lane, which has a huge monkey-

puzzle tree in the grounds. was built in 1850 for Sir Robert Hoare, then land agent to Hothfield Place.

Turn right into The Street, following the old estate wall. The parkland to your right is called **Ice House Field (9)**, as this is where ice was stored in a deep brick-lined pit for use at the mansion. The Ice House was levelled in the 1960s. The field was also the site of what was known as the Gas House. Dismantled before the war, and used to house chickens in the 1950s, it too was levelled in the 1960s but if you look over the estate wall you can still see the circular gasholder base.

The old Rectory once stood adjacent to Ice House Field, probably not far from the village hall. Thirty lime trees formed an avenue from the Church to the Rectory, known as Rector's Walk, of which fourteen were still standing in 1900, although the Rectory itself was demolished in 1808-09.

Many houses in The Street suffered war damage: Thanet House had all its windows blown out and No. 5, High House, was barely habitable. If you look up at the eaves of **High House (10)** you will see a painted inscription, which begins 'Dr Coetlogon's Genuine True and Original Tincture and other Medicines by the King's Patents'. And inscribed over the doorway 'Drugs, Oyls, Glass and Earthen Wares 1762'. Dr Coetlogon was a Huguenot, who sold the rights in his tincture to a Mr Haffenden of Bethersden, who sold it as Haffenden's Tincture, the name by which it was known well into the 18th century.

Further down The Street you will come to No. 24, the **Tufton Bailiffhouse (11)**, which was once the Thanet Arms and before that the King's Head. Dating from the 17th century or earlier, this is where the Ashford Valley Hunt used to meet and the Bolebrook beagles are still kennelled in Hothfield. The houses opposite date from the mid-1950s, replacements for the Nissen huts. The street names – Tufton Street, Coach Drive, Sackville Close – all reflect local interest.

As you approach the T-junction with School Road (right) and West Street (left), you will see in front of you the **Victorian village school (12)**, now a children's centre, which was built in 1874 by Sir Henry Tufton, 1st Baron Hothfield. In 1900 there were 166 children; the school was closed that year due to a measles epidemic, in 1902 for chicken pox and in 1906 for scarlet fever. The long summer breaks were filled with hop-picking. Turn left into West Street. This is where the school was originally situated. As you pass Nos 1-9 you can still see the inscription over the porch of the centre house: 'These schools were erected by the Earl of Thanet in 1834'. This is where the schoolmaster lived and where the children were taught. No. 1 West Street was later a butcher's shop.

Next pick up the footpath behind the school that leads to **Hothfield Heathlands** (formerly known as Hothfield common), one of England's last remaining ancient heathlands and Kent's last surviving valley bog (13). It is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a local nature reserve due to its acid grassland, bogs, mires and wooded heath. There is a nature trail and many footpaths across its 100 acres. Take the Giants and Bogs Walk across two boardwalks. The common was probably an ancient grazing ground during the Bronze

Age. Earliest records suggest that the name 'Hothfield' is of Saxon origin and comes from 'heath', meaning a place where wood was once felled. Following the Roman invasion, the common became the property of the Lord of the Manor. For some 1000 years, apart from stock grazing, the common would also have provided wood, turf and peat for fuel, heather faggots for road foundations, bog moss for wound dressings and bracken for stock bedding.

It is notable for its rich and varied plant life, insects, birds and reptiles. Look out for heather, cross-leaved heath, dwarf and common gorse, spotted orchids, bog asphodel and round-leaved sundew; dragonflies, such as the keeled skimmer; and the viviparous lizard and grass snake. The Kent Wildlife Trust manages this remarkable landscape, restoring favourable habitats for increased biodiversity. A herd of Highland cattle and Konik ponies also now graze the site from time to time, to encourage heath bog species to re-colonise.

With the advent of the Second World War, the common, together with Hothfield Hospital (the former workhouse), which was at the north-west corner, was requisitioned as an army training ground. If you pick up the Fen and Dragonfly Walk and head towards a third boardwalk, you will come to a wide trench, still known as the 'tank trap', which was probably used to camouflage Bren Gun carriers – one of a number of visible wartime reminders, which also include First World War practice trenches. Turn around and walk up the hill for the best views of the surrounding Kent countryside.

Bordering the common on its east side is Cade Road, possibly a reference to the legendary Jack Cade. In 1450 increased taxes imposed by Henry VI and corrupt local landowners sowed the seeds of rebellion and the men of Kent and Sussex, led by Jack Cade, marched on London. They defeated the Royalist forces near Sevenoaks, only just failing to take the Tower of London. Cade fled to the Weald, the King having demanded his arrest, but he was apprehended by Alexander Iden, Sheriff of Kent, and died en route to London.

Retrace your steps to the school house and cross School Road into The Street. Turn left to return to the village hall.

Compiled by Hothfield History Society, 2010



Left: The Sackville-Tufton coat of arms, which resides at Home Farm. It is dated 1629, the year in which John Tufton, 2nd Earl of Thanet, married Margaret Sackville.

Photo: courtesy Rixpix