Coulsdon Common and Kenley Airfield walk. 4.25 miles (7.0 km) 2 hours.

A circular walk that begins and ends at Chaldon Church.

Location of the start and end of the walk. OS Explorer Map 146. Map reference: TQ309557. Post Code: CR3 5AL. what 3 words: post, swan, much
The bracketed numbers in the walk description refer to the Waypoint numbers on the map.

There is an option to walk around Kenley Airfield on the Heritage Trail. This is a further 2.0 miles (3.3 km) and takes another hour.

Using this self-guided walk

The directions for this walk are in number order on Page 1 to Page 5. There is a map of the walk on Page 9, the last page. These directions were accurate in October 2025, but please note that over time gates, stiles and footpath signs may change. If you have a dog, you must bring a lead as you will be crossing busy roads and sometimes there may be livestock in the fields.

Descriptions of points of interest and local history are included at the end of the walk directions from Page 5 to Page 8. These are indicated by the direction number and an alphabetical letter in bold italics. For example, **2A** refers to the second direction and the associated information.

1. From the church gate (1) turn left and walk to the right of the green. At the end of the road turn right onto Church Lane and then almost immediately turn left (2) onto a footpath with a wooden fingerpost showing the direction to Piles Wood. There is a green metal pole blocking vehicle access to this field to stop fly-tipping, which is a major problem in this area. **Dogs on a lead to cross the road**

2. Cross this field with horse paddocks on the right. To your left is a large open field with a view down the valley towards Farthing Downs. Keep on the footpath passing Piles Wood with tall holly hedges on your left. Continue to a T junction (3) with a gravel track, which is the Leazes Bridleway. There is a footpath post and signs showing the direction to Happy Valley to the left and Leazes Avenue to the right***. 2A***

3. Turn left onto the gravel Leazes Bridleway following the direction to Happy Valley and passing the entrances to four houses on the right-hand side of the bridleway. This narrows and enters woodland after passing the entrance gate to the fourth house (Broadwood). Piles Wood is on the left and Broad Wood is on the right. These are both private woods and in April are full of bluebells.

Keep dogs on a lead on this bridleway

4. Continue on the bridleway with a wood and wire fence on the right. The bridleway goes gently downhill passing the end of the wooded area of Piles Wood

on the left. Continue down the bridleway which levels out at a cross junction (4) with a footpath and a three-way footpath signpost. To the left are the open fields of Happy Valley Park. You go straight ahead which is the direction for Coulsdon Common and continue in the same direction as before. The bridleway now climbing uphill, becoming narrower, sunk into the chalk and more enclosed with brambles and other plants.

5. Eventually the bridleway levels out in more open woodland, bends to the right and reaches a tarred road, (5) The Grove, with a metal gate. There are houses on the right-hand side and a wooden fenced field with tall mature trees on the left. This is Coulsdon Common and there may be Sussex cattle or sheep grazing here. You go through the metal barrier into the road and continue in the same direction as before. You have a choice to walk on the road (the Grove) or in the field to your left. The houses and buildings to your right were formerly part of the Caterham Barracks. **Keep dogs on a lead here. *5A***

6. Continue to the end of the Grove and cross over Coulsdon Road onto a footpath with woods to the left and the backs of houses to the right. There is a footpath sign showing the direction to Stites Hill Road ¼ mile and this is the direction you follow. You pass a white iron coal post on the right side of the footpath. ***Dogs on a lead to cross the road 6A***

7. Continue on the footpath with woods to your left and houses to your right. The path goes downhill to meet with Stites Hill Road. There is another coal post on the verge to the right of the path. Cross over the road and turn left (6) to a footpath post and then turn right following the direction on the footpath sign to Hayes Lane/Buxton Lane ¼ mile. The path goes uphill through woods and when the path levels out at the brow of the hill you emerge into a less wooded area with a wooden fenced paddock and buildings to the right. ***7A***

8. Continue in the same direction as before, passing a wooden gate into a road on the right, (Merlewood Close), with a flagpole and noticeboard. The path goes gently downhill into a dip with wooded fields on your left and houses on the right. In summer the fields to your left and right may hold grazing sheep or cattle from the City of London, Merlewood estate farm.

Keep dogs on a lead as there may be livestock here.

9. Continue going downhill into a dip and at a fork take the path to the right which goes uphill close to the houses to meet Hayes Lane/Buxton Lane (7). Exit through a wooden gate and cross the road to a white metal boundary post; "Croydon Rural District 1895 Coulsdon". Turn left on Fenemore Road and continue towards a metal barrier with a "No Parking" sign, passing Egan Close on the right. Notice that the roads here are named after WWII pilots who served at Kenley.

Dogs on a lead here

10. Go onto the path behind the metal barrier and continue walking towards the airfield ahead of you. ***10A***

11. When you reach the open space of the airfield there is an information board in the shape of half of a Spitfire wing on which there is a map of the airfield (8). Turn left here and walk along the perimeter keeping to the left of the wooden fence that prevents entry onto the runways. This fence was recently installed and has caused some controversy as formerly it was relatively easy, but rather foolish, to walk onto the runway while Air Cadet gliders were taking off and landing. ***11A***

Keep dogs on a lead to stop them straying onto the open airfield

12. Keep walking on the perimeter track and to your left across a grass field you can see a red brick wall in the woods. This was the rifle range and there is an information board about this to the left of the track. Continue in the same direction passing (9) a derelict Blast Pen on the left and when you reach the far edge of this you will see to the left, ahead of you a restored Blast Pen and a white memorial stone in front of it (10). This is the RAF Kenley Tribute.

13. Walk towards the restored Blast Pen and the Tribute (11). You will notice a number of information boards, some in the shape of aircraft wings (specifically Spitfire and Hurricane wings). Take the opportunity to look at these. ***13A***

Option to Walk the Airfield Heritage Trail.
From the Tribute you can choose to walk the Kenley Heritage Trail. This circular walk of 2 miles (3.3 Km) takes about an hour to complete. You can walk it in a clockwise or anticlockwise direction. There are information boards placed around the airfield perimeter and you can download a walk guide.
https://www.kenleyrevival.org/content/learning/downloadable-self-guided-walks

Continuing the walk back to Chaldon Church
14. With your back to the Tribute and facing the open airfield turn right (12) and walk on a tarred track towards Hayes Lane. You pass another half Spitfire wing information boards to reach a wooden fence and steps going down to the roadside. Exit through a wooden gate and cross over Hayes Lane to a wooden kissing gate on the opposite side of the road. Go through the kissing gate into woods (13) . **Dogs on a lead to cross this busy road**.***14A***

15. Continue on the path which goes downhill through woods to emerge into an open field. Follow the grass path going downhill across the middle of the field and walking diagonally towards a gap in the woods. There are houses to your right and woods to the left. When you reach the bottom of the slope and the path levels out keep slightly to the right and aim for the grass path going uphill through a gap in the woods (14). Walk up this fairly steep and wide path.

Continue going uphill until the path levels out. To your left was the site of Neville House and you are walking in what was once the gardens.

16. When the path levels out you can see between the trees the backs of houses on the right behind a fence. You pass a wooden bench on the right and the path goes steeply downhill into a dip. At the bottom of the dip, you cross two paths (15) and on the right the end of a road (Caterham Drive). Keep ahead as the path goes steeply uphill towards a road.

17. When you reach the top of the slope the path bends to the right and you follow this with woods on the right and the road (Stites Hill Road) to your left (16). Follow the grass path now walking parallel with the road. After about 100m you cross Rydons Lane (17). Continue in the same direction until you reach the buildings of Windmill Farm on the right. **Dogs on a lead to cross the road. *17A***

18. From Windmill Farm turn left (18), cross over the road and into a gap in the woods on Coulsdon Common. Ahead of you is a wooden fenced field with a wooden gate. This field is where the windmills were located. Go through the gate and cross the field to another wooden gate on the opposite side. Exit through the gate and turn right on a grass path. After about 10 metres at a T junction of paths turn left. Shortly after this turn emerge from the woods into an open space and right onto a wider tarmac and gravel path towards a gate and Coulsdon Road.

Dogs on a lead to cross this busy road.

19. Cross over the road with a signboard for the Fox pub on the right (19). The road to your left is Fox Lane. Walk onto a grass path going diagonally across the middle of an open field with a stone water fountain in the middle of this field. ***19A***

20. Continue walking across the open field passing the water fountain on your left and aiming for the far end of Fox Lane. When you reach the road there is a noticeboard on the right. At the three way footpath sign follow the direction to Farthing Downs (20).

21. Continue under the yellow barrier across the road, which becomes a track passing a car park on the left and another notice board with a flag pole. This is the main car park for Coulsdon Common and you are likely to find this quite busy with dog walkers and ramblers, particularly at weekends.

Keep dogs on a lead by the car park

22. Continue through another metal barrier. There is a footpath sign showing that this is on the Downlands Circular Walk. Keep on the tarred track, with an open field on the left and a narrow strip of woodland on the right. After about

400 metres the track enters a wide gap in the woods and goes gently downhill and slightly to the right (21). Ignore other paths until the track emerges into a sloping open field with the view of Happy Valley opening up ahead of you. There is a three way footpath sign post on the right as you emerge (22) . You turn sharp left and go steeply downhill following the direction for Chaldon Church ¾ mile.

23. The steep downhill path has wooden fronted steps and you finally emerge on the valley floor. Cross over a bridleway and a grass footpath to continue in the same direction now climbing back up the opposite slope of the valley, with a hedge on your left. The view to your right is towards Farthing Downs.

24. At the top of the slope there is a wooden bench and a wooden footpath sign (23). Follow the finger post pointing to the gap in the woods (south) which is marked to Chaldon Church ½ mile. Go up a short slope to enter an open field. The path crosses the field going gently uphill. Unless the field has been recently ploughed the path should be obvious but in winter or after sustained rain it may be very muddy.

25. At the brow of the hill you will have a view across the valley towards Chaldon Church, Chaldon Court and Court Farm. The church is hidden behind the trees. In winter you may just see the steeple. Continue on the path now going downhill towards the treeline and a road, Ditches Lane, in the valley floor. To your right on the skyline, you will glimpse the brick water tower of Netherne. The site of this former asylum is now a private housing estate. Another of these church walks takes you through the grounds of Netherne.

26. When you reach the treeline follow the path up a steep bank and onto the road. Turn left and go up the road for a few yards towards the Chaldon 1086 sign. Turn right going up the road to the church entrance gate and the end of this walk.

Dogs on a lead to cross and walk up the road.

Points of interest and local history

2A Sequoias on Leazes Avenue
Looking to your right you can see the open green in Leazes Avenue, and to the left of this green you can see a line of very tall Giant Sequoia trees, (also known as Wellingtonias). These were planted sometime between 1876 and 1885 by the local landowner, James Bank Taylor, to mark the avenue to his estate at Fryern Farm, which is about a mile north east of here across what is now a golf course.

5A Caterham Barracks
Between 1877 and 1995 this was the Guards Depot for the five Guards Regiments, (Coldstream, Grenadiers, Irish, Scots and Welsh). When completed it was the largest army depot in Britain. Sold to a developer in 1998 this is a now a large "urban village" with several of the original, listed barracks buildings converted to flats and community facilities, with some new built housing added

as well. Where you joined the Grove the terraced houses on the right-hand side of the road were formerly the married quarters.

6A Coal posts

After the 1666 Great Fire of London, Parliament passed legislation to tax the entry of coal into London. The revenue from this was used to rebuild the City of London. You can see that the post displays a City of London shield, which is white with a red cross. The tax paid for the rebuilding of St Pauls and other City of London churches that had been destroyed by the fire. Coal posts marked the boundary within which the coal tax was levied. In 1845 the Coal Duties Act set the boundary around London as 20 miles from the General Post Office in the City of London.

By the 18th Century the tax revenue was no longer needed for rebuilding and was designated to the building of 50 new churches in London. Only 12 of these "Queen Anne Churches" were built, of which six were designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor in the 1720's. The coal tax continued to be collected during the 19th Century and with the rapid growth of London and the demand for coal this became a major source of income for the City of London. The coal tax was finally abolished in 1889.

This coal post dates from the reign of Victoria. You can tell this from the writing on the side of the post. This reads: 4 & 25 VICT CAP42.

CAP42 refers to Acts of Parliament and 4 and 25 refer to these Acts being passed in the 4th and 25th years of the reign of Queen Victoria (VICT). Victoria's reign began in 1837 so these Acts were passed in 1840 and 1861. They were the 1840 Port of London Coal and Wines Import Duties Act and the 1861 London Coal & Wines Duties Continuation Act.

There are still 200 coal posts left. Most are made of cast iron like this one. Some are smaller and made of stone and a few are obelisks. Many can be found, like this one, on land owned by the City of London. The coal tax revenue accumulated by the City paid for the purchase in the 1870's and 1880's of open land and commons surrounding London to stop urban development.

Apart from Coulsdon Common, the City of London also owns Ashtead Common, Farthing Downs, Kenley Common, Riddlesdown, Spring Park and West Wickham Common. To the north and west of London it owns Epping Forest, Wanstead Common, Hampstead Heath and Burnham Beeches. This incredibly farsighted decision made in the 19th Century and paid for by the coal tax limited the urban sprawl of London and preserved these valuable London "lungs".

7A Merlewood

This is the City of London Merlewood Estate office and farm. In winter you may see cattle and sheep wintering in the fenced paddock. In summer the livestock will be grazing out in the commons owned by the City of London. In the 19th Century this area of the common was farmland with three main fields named;

The Maze, Merlewood Near and Merlewood Far. The rest of the Common was rough grazing for livestock. You are standing in what was once the field of Merlewood Near.

To your left (north) was the site of Neville House which was built in 1883.The house was used as an army billet in WWII and demolished in 1945. You can still see the level site of the house, gardens and tennis courts if you walk a few yards to the north of the estate buildings.

10A Kenley Common and Kenley Airfield

Kenley Common was purchased by the City of London in 1883 at the same time as Coulsdon Common and Farthing Downs. Some of the common was used as a golf course and there is Golf Road on the north side of Kenley Common. During WWI in June 1917 the land was compulsory taken over under the Defence of the Realm Act to be used as an airfield. This caused a public outcry, but once German bombers and Zeppelins began bombing nearby Croydon and Purley, this quickly abated.

In 1918 a factory making Handley Page bombers was built on the west side of the airfield. The bombers were assembled and tested here before being flown to France by the Royal Flying Corp (which became the RAF in 1918). At the end of the war the airfield was not returned to the City of London and became an RAF base.

From 1934 to 1939 Empire Air Days were held here which attracted large crowds from London and Kenley became an important front line fighter base. In the Battle of Britain Kenley was a Sector HQ and controlled other fighter bases in Croydon, Redhill, Gatwick and Shoreham. The fighter squadrons here were equipped with Hurricanes and Spitfires, and an international range of pilots.

During WWII pilots from a number of countries served with their squadrons at Kenley: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, New Zealand, Poland and the UK. You can get some idea of the range of pilots who served, (and died), here if you visit the war grave site in St Lukes, Whyteleafe churchyard.

The films "Angels One Five" and "Reach for the Sky" were filmed at Kenley in the 1950s and these two films re-enact the Battle of Britain very effectively.

After 1945 Kenley remained an RAF base until 1974, but was unsuited to modern jet aircraft. It remains an active airfield and is used by the gliders of the Air Cadets and the Surrey Hills Gliding Club.

In 2003 English Heritage recognised the Ancient Monument status of the Blast Pens at Kenley and it was seen as a uniquely unspoiled example of a front-line Battle of Britain airfield which required preservation. Since then, the City of London, English Heritage, the local councils and Kenley Airfield Friends Group have worked together to raise funds for preservation. The results of their efforts

can be seen in the restoration of the Blast Pens, information boards and signage around the airfield, and in the RAF Kenley Tribute memorial which was placed here in 2000.

11A Walking on the airfield

There are gates in the fence onto the airfield and if these are open you can walk onto the runways if there are no gliders operating. The airfield perimeter is very popular for walking and exercise, and many children in the Caterham area have learned to ride a bicycle here.

13A The Blast Pen and the RAF Kenley Tribute

When you reach the Blast Pen you will see the outlines of two aircraft painted onto the concrete surface. Blast Pens were built so that aircraft were dispersed around the airfield in case of attack. After a sortie the aircraft were fuelled and readied in the Pen. At the back of the Pen are bunkers for the ground crew and you can see the heavy blast doors.

There are 11 Blast Pens around the airfield and this one has been restored to show what it looked like in the Battle of Britain. The Blast Pens are one of the unique features of Kenley which has led to its preservation as the only remaining example of a front-line RAF airfield as it was in 1940.

This memorial in Portland Stone was sculpted by Bridget Powell and commemorates all the personnel who served at Kenley from 1917 to 1959.

14A WWI Bomber factory.

In 1918 a Handley Page bomber factory was located here to your right. In WWI and WWII Hayes Lane was closed and was a part of the airfield with the main runway continuing across this road.

17A Windmills on Coulsdon Common

There were two windmills near here. There was a Post Mill located in what is now woodland, (Windmill Wood), on the other side of the road opposite the Windmill Farm buildings. This mill was built in 1777 and working until 1898. It was demolished in 1924. The earlier mill is thought to have been located here as well, but it is not known when it was built and demolished. You will be crossing the Windmill Wood field in which these mills were located.

19A Fox Lane and the Fox Pub

Fox Lane is on your left and as you walk towards the water fountain you can see Old Fox Close which is left off Fox Lane. In the 19th Century a workhouse was located at the end of Old Fox Close. You will also see the Fox pub on the left. This dates from 1720.

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