Alderstead Heath, Shepherds Hill and Dean Lane railway tunnels walk 4.3 miles (7 km), 2.5 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: parts, swan, much.

Using this self-guided walk

The directions for this walk are in number order on Page 1 to Page 4. There is a map of the walk with the numbered directions on Page 8, the last page. These directions were checked in September 2026, but please note that over time the 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 will be livestock in the fields.

Descriptions of points of interest and local history are included at the end of the walk directions from Page 4 to Page 7. These are indicated by the direction number and an alphabetical letter in bold italics. For example, **1A** refers to the first direction and the associated information.

1. From the gate into the churchyard bear right across the parking space to a wooden kissing gate with a footpath sign to Alderstead Heath. Go through this into an open field. ***1A***

2. Cross the open field bearing slightly right towards a hedge and through another wooden kissing gate in the hedge. Continue across the next open field towards Alderstead Heath with the buildings of Court Farm to your right. The path dips into a shallow valley and continues gently back up the valley towards the wooded Alderstead Heath ahead and slightly to your right. ***There may be livestock in this field. Dogs on a lead.***

3. Enter the wooded heath over a wooden stile, with a large coppiced beech tree, (which is a geocache location), on the right. Walk a few yards to the concrete track and turn left on this track, ignoring the concrete track straight ahead. ***3A***

4. At a T junction of paths with a three-way footpath signpost turn sharp left and very shortly after this turn left off the concrete path onto an earth path going towards a hedge and an open field. Do not take the concrete path going towards the road (Rook Lane). Cross into the field by a broken stile with a footpath post, and a Tandridge Border Path sign. Keep to the right-hand edge of the field with a hedge and Rook Lane on your right. This is the same field that you crossed earlier before entering the heath. ***There may be livestock in this field. Dogs on a lead.*** Continue walking on the footpath with the hedge and road on your right. Eventually the path bends right and you reach a wooden gate in the hedge on your right. ***Take care as the gate opens straight onto the road. Dogs on a lead to cross this road.***

5. Go through the gate and cross over Rook Lane onto a wide concrete track that goes towards Tollsworth Manor and Tollsworth Manor Farm. There is a two way public bridleway signpost showing Tollsworth Manor Farm ¼ mile. Follow this track passing a cottage on your left until you reach a house on your left and the buildings of Tollsworth Manor Farm to the right. ***5A***

6. Just past the manor house turn left on the wide chalk track. The chalk track bends to the right and after 50 metres you fork right onto a grass track. There is an old green metal signpost in the hedge as you fork right, marking the direction to Shepherds Hill.

7. The grass track bears right into an open field. Continue following the track across the field.

8. Go into the next field keeping to the left of the hedge line on the right hand side. To your left there a view across the edge of the North Downs scarp with Bletchingley, Nutfield, the M25 and M23 motorways in the valley below. Ahead and slightly left are Merstham, Redhill and in the distance, Gatwick airport. To your right across the fields you can glimpse the red brick Netherne water tower. Underneath these fields and beneath your feet are the Chaldon Stone quarries. There are 10 miles of tunnels into the chalk hillside you are walking across. ***8A.***

9. At the end of the field, with a tree lined hedge to your left, turn left and go diagonally downhill across the open field towards a wooded copse on the right. When you reach the copse continue diagonally downhill and slightly to your right across the open field to a wooded area. The path should be obvious, unless the field has been ploughed recently.

10. Go into the wood through a narrow gap in the hedge with a tall fence on the left. There is yellow public footpath arrow in the hedge on the right of the path. Continue on this path with the fence on the left and the gardens of the houses on Shepherds Hill to the right. Follow this narrow path beside the tall fence and you can hear the M23 on the left in the valley below.

11. Eventually you climb some concrete steps to emerge onto the road (Shepherds Hill). Turn left and walk down the road almost to the bridge over the M23 passing Beech Road on the right.

12. When you reach the bridge cross over the road and bear right onto a track which is a public footpath. Do not cross the bridge. Keep left as the track narrows to a path. After crossing two derelict stiles you enter a wood with the delightful name of Sparticles Wood.

13. Keep to the path climbing gently uphill to reach a circular brick air vent for the rail tunnel behind a wire fence on your left. The path enters an open field with a tall circular brick tower ahead. Cross the open field keeping to the right hand edge passing a tall brick tower on the right and later you will see circular brick air vents to the left as you walk across the open fields towards Dean Lane. These air vents are for the two 19 Century railway tunnels that are beneath the fields you are crossing. **13A, 13B, 13C and**

13D. Read the history of the railway tunnels and the air vents before you cross the fields. As the tree line ends on the right you go through a wide gap in the hedges and turn slightly to the right to walk on a raised soil path that divides two fields. There is a small wooden pole with yellow footpath arrows showing the directions. Continue on this raised path going gently downhill towards a road (Dean Lane).

14. Just before the road bear slightly left into the field to exit to the left of a green iron barrier. Cross over Dean Lane turning left and then almost immediately right into a wood. There is a two way wooden footpath sign showing the direction you take. **Take care crossing this road. Dogs on a lead.**

15. The path emerges into an open field and you turn right and follow the right hand edge of the field with a wood to your right. To your left are views across the valley towards Hooley and the A23 Brighton Road.

16. Continue on this path with woods on your right to a gap in the hedge ahead of you and cross over a soil barrier in the path to meet with a cross path. This is Grasscuts Shaw and you turn right onto the cross path. To your left is Netherne Lane. Across the other side of this road was the site of Alsted Manor. ***16A***

17. Having turned right continue on the cross path to emerge into a large open field. The path across this field leads to the access road and the entrance to Alderstead Heath Caravan Park. Go straight across the open field. Unless recently ploughed the footpath should be clear. The strange looking circular concrete humps in this field are the sewer main. You pass close to one on the left.

18. At the end of the field go through a metal gate and cross over the access road to the caravan park. Pass to the left of a green metal gate ahead of you with a footpath post on the right. You enter onto a concrete apron into Alderstead Heath. There is a WW2 plane crash site here. ***18A.*** **Dogs on a lead to cross the road.** From the crash site, return to the path from the gate. Do not take the path to the right. Continue in the same direction as you entered this path through the gate. The path goes between two metal poles, then down a dip and back up. About 50m from the bottom of the dip turn left onto another concrete path and follow this through the wood.

19. The path bends to the right, going slightly downhill and passing a low ruined brick structure on the left, the remains of a WW2 military structure. **19A**

20. Continue until the path bends sharply to the right and you will see a gap in the hedge to your left with a wooden stile to the right of a large coppiced beech tree. There is another path coming in from the right and a small footpath post. You will recognise that you are now returning to the Church on the same path that you came along to Alderstead Heath earlier in this walk. **If there are livestock in the fields ahead, put dogs on a lead.**

21. Turn left by the beech tree and cross the stile to turn sharp left into an open field with a hedge on the left. Ahead is a wide path crossing the open field. The path goes down into a shallow valley and then back up the valley slope. Continue on the path as it climbs gently towards a hedge and a wooden kissing gate. Go through the gate and into another open field.

22. The path goes slightly left across the fields towards an iron gate and a wooden kissing gate on the left. As you cross the field you will see Chaldon Church ahead.

Points of interest and local history

***1A* Chaldon Church Pond**

Look to the right just before you go through the kissing gate to see a pond behind the wall and on the left side of the farm road. Ponds were used by the farm and by Chaldon villagers as a local water supply until the late 19th Century when piped water was finally available.

3A Alderstead Heath

You can see that the tracks in this wood are solid concrete. During WW2, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps used Alderstead Heath as an Armoured Fighting Vehicle depot. Prior to D–Day in 1944 it was also used by the tanks of the Canadian Army, who were stationed in Redhill. To enable their tanks to come up Dean Lane to Alderstead Heath the Canadian Army engineers had to widen the road bridge over the railway line where Dean Lane joins the A23.

5A Tollsworth Manor and Tollsworth Manor Farm

The manor dates from the 14th Century (1326 - 1358) and its original timber frame is partially clad in local Chaldon stone which was quarried nearby. From 1936 – 1965 this was a Youth Hostel but is now a private house.

Chaldon is lucky to have two working farms. Tollsworth Manor Farm and Court Farm are owned by the Merstham Estate and both are tenanted by a local farmer as mixed arable and livestock farmland. The name Chaldon is a corruption of the Saxon "Chalvedune" which is thought to mean 'calves down', where the calves were pastured. So possibly there have been working farms here for more than 1,000 years.

8A The Chaldon stone mines and tunnels

Beneath you on the North Downs scarp is a 10 mile warren of ancient mine tunnels that were built into the hillside to quarry building stone. These mines have been dated from the 11th Century, but may be even older. Local caving

clubs have mapped the tunnels and occasionally organise visits. If you are offered the chance to visit these tunnels, take it.

Chaldon stone, also known as Firestone, Merstham stone or Reigate stone, was widely used as a building material locally and in London. It was used in the building of Windsor Castle, Westminster Abbey and St Pauls. Chaldon Church and Tollsworth Manor are partly built with Chaldon stone. The font in Chaldon Church is made of Chaldon Stone. There are locked tunnel entrances on Rockshaw Road which runs parallel to the scarp edge and is in the valley below you. There are more tunnel entrances just to the other side of the bridge over the railway line and the M23, where Shepherds Hill joins the A23.

13A The railway tunnels and an infamous unsolved murder

There are two railway tunnels under these fields. To the left (west) is the Merstham tunnel and to the right (east) the Quarry tunnel. Both railway lines in these tunnels go from London to Brighton.

All but one of the brick towers you will see here are the air vents for the tunnels. The tall brick tower to the right as you entered the open field is not an air vent but a sighting tower, built in 1838 to help align the Merstham tunnel.

As you walk towards Dean Lane the tunnel air vents to the left mark the line of the earlier Merstham tunnel which was built between 1839 and 1841. This tunnel is 1.04 miles long and was built for the London and Brighton Railway which ran from London Bridge to Brighton, via Croydon. When it opened the interior of the tunnel was whitewashed and fitted with gas lighting to make the passengers feel safer. This was soon abandoned because of the soot from the engines.

The Quarry tunnel to the right was built between 1896 and 1899. It is 1.2 miles long and built 25 feet closer to the surface than the Merstham tunnel.

In 1905 there was an infamous murder committed in this tunnel. The victim was Mary Money and she was thrown from the train. The murder has never been solved, although her brother Robert has always been the prime suspect because in 1912, he murdered his wife and children.

13B Fly tipping and robbery

Unfortunately, these fields and Dean Lane are plagued by fly tipping and you may see evidence of this abhorrent practice. When you have passed the tall brick sighting tower to the right you will see a wooded copse ahead and down the open field to your left. There is a brick air vent for the Merstham tunnel in this copse. Take a small diversion and walk down to view this air vent more closely and you may see a blown up safe. This was stolen from Ewell public library, driven or dragged here from Dean Lane and blown up by some rather incompetent thieves.

13C The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway

The first public railway in the world was built here in the valley to your left which is now the route of the A23.

The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway was completed in 1806. This was a horse drawn railway which started near Quality Street in Merstham. Until recently there was some signage and a bit of rail by the roadside here. You can also find the railway cutting alongside the A23 between Shepherds Hill and where the M23 joins the A23.

The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway joined up with the Surrey Iron Railway near Beddington and followed the River Wandle to Wandsworth and the Thames. This was also horse drawn.

This was the first public railway as all previous railways had been privately owned by mines. It only carried freight, which was grain and farm produce from Surrey to London and coal from Newcastle, via Wandsworth, back into Surrey. It closed in 1838 when the London and Brighton Railway was being built.

13D Netherne Hospital

Follow the right-hand side of open fields and you will see the brick water tower of Netherne Hospital among the trees ahead.

Opened in 1909 as the Surrey County Asylum this is a former mental hospital. In 1867 the Metropolitan Asylums Board began a programme of building asylums to accommodate the former inmates of the London workhouses who were considered to be mentally deficient. This included a large number of the elderly, single mothers and children whose behaviour did not fit the standards of Victorian and Edwardian society.

Most of these new asylums were built on the periphery of London from 1870 to the early 1900s and are located in a ring around the capital which closely matches the location of the M25. Oher local examples of these asylums are St Lawrence's in Caterham and Cane Hill in Coulsdon. The poet and novelist Ian Sinclair rather aptly described these asylums as the "Gulags of London".

Almost all of the asylums were closed in the 1990s and have been converted into private housing estates. Netherne closed in 1994 and the housing estate dates from 2008. The brick water tower was converted into flats.

16A Alsted Manor

On the west side of Netherne Lane was the site of a Medieval Manor House, Alsted Manor. This was a sub manor of Merstham Manor and dates from 1211. Merstham Manor was owned by the Prior of Canterbury Cathedral. There was also an associated farm and a forge for iron smelting. After archaeological investigation in the 1970's the site has been re buried. The name Alderstead is a corruption of Alsted.

18A Alderstead Heath, the Caravan Park and a tragic plane crash
There has been a caravan park here since the early 1950s and originally this was called Dean Lane Camp. It was built on the concrete stands and roads left here when they were no longer used by tanks and armoured vehicles.

As you enter the Heath from the caravan park access road look to your right across the concrete apron to see a memorial tied to a silver birch tree. This memorial marks the site of the crash of an RAF Avro Anson on 29th September 1944 in which all five crew members were killed.

19A Alderstead Fort
In 1890 Alderstead Fort was built nearby as part of the London Defence Position which was a string of forts from Epping Forest to the North Downs. This fort is preserved as an ancient monument, but is not open to the public. You cannot see the fort from this walk, but you can see its location on the right-hand side of the road as you drive on Alderstead Lane just before you reach Shepherds Hill. Locally the best-preserved fort of this type which is open to the public is on Reigate Hill and is owned by the National Trust.

The walk map is on the next page (Page 8)