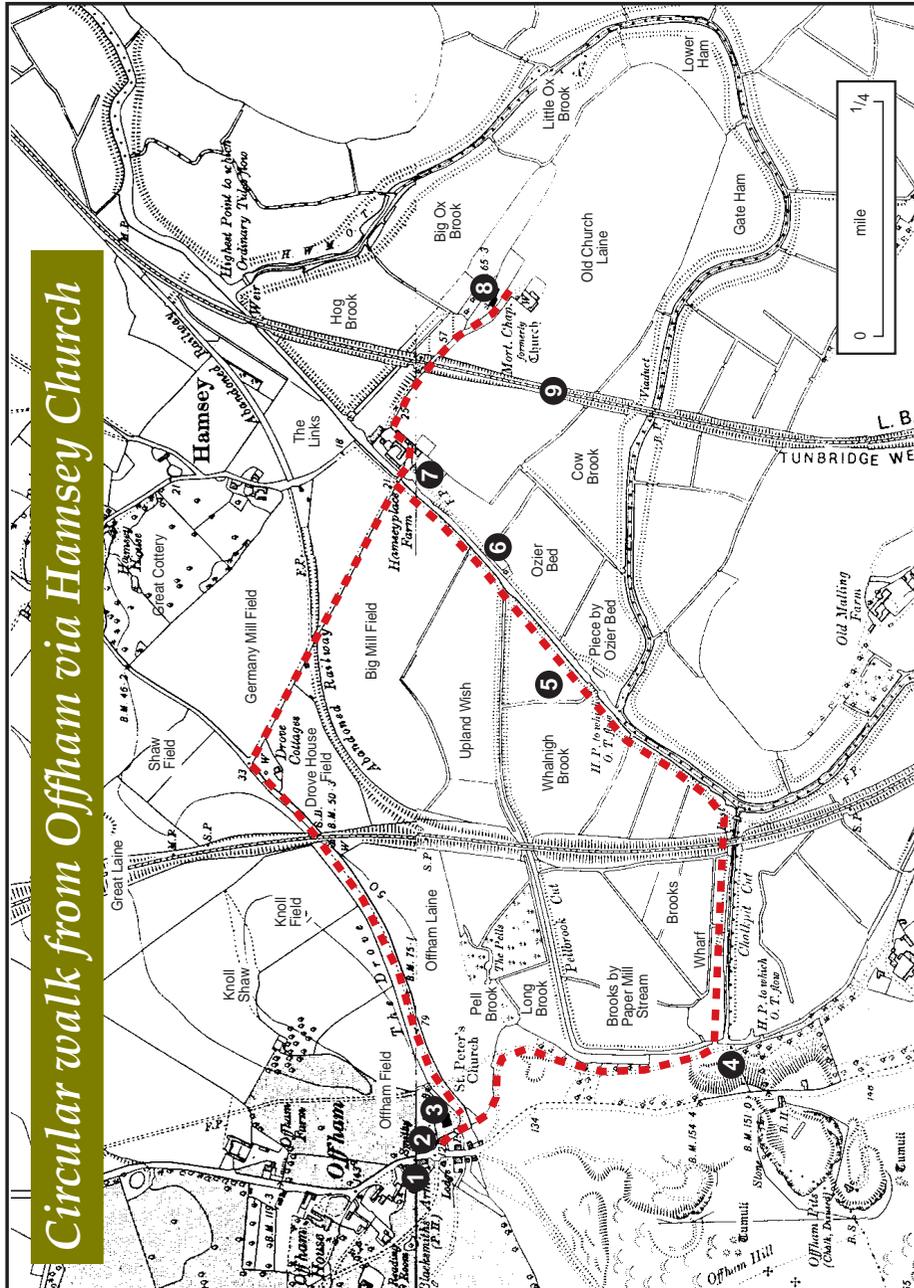


Circular walk from Offham via Hamsey Church



1 Offham village

Offham has had various names in the past including: Wogham, Wocham, Oakham, Wougham, Wodham, Woham and Offham Street. By 1770 the turnpike from Lewes to East Grinstead had been constructed and the toll house was situated where today the Drove joins the main road. In the Tithe schedule of 1838 William Hollingdale is the toll gate keeper and the 1841 Census tells us that he also carried out shoe repairs. In 1851 Alfred Smith collected the tolls and in 1861 James Barnes and his wife, Maria, had the job. By the next census year, 1871, the building is described as a shoemaker's shop, late Toll House and no reference is made to a toll gate keeper from this time on.

2 The Jubilee Shelter, Offham

This was built to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935. The site and materials were donated by Sir Henry Shiffner and building was carried out by voluntary labour from the village. Responsibility on completion was given to the parish council. An ornamental oak seat was paid for by Elsie, Lady Shiffner as a gift to the parish. Owing to various circumstances including the widening of the road and granting of planning permission, the shelter was not completed until two years later - in time for the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 12 May 1937.

3 St Peter's Church, Offham

The 'new' church was built in 1858/9 to replace the old church at Hamsey, also dedicated to St Peter, which apart from falling into disrepair was suffering from dwindling congregations due to its remoteness. The architect was Ewan Christian of 10 Whitehall and Parker Ayers & Co. of Haywards Heath were the builders. The cost of £2,636 did not include furnishings or decoration. The church was consecrated by Bishop Gilbert on 21 July 1860, ten years into the 58 year incumbency of Sir George Shiffner, who was known affectionately as 'Sir Jarge'.

There is a reference to a 'chapel of ease in Wogham' in 1534. The site of this could be opposite Offham House, where two buildings are shown on a map of 1701 but have disappeared by 1813. We are planning to carry out a resistivity survey with the County Archaeologist to see if this can be established.

4 Chalk Pit and Wharf

The brideway to Landport, running below the present A275, was the original coaching road from Chailey to Lewes. It was also the route for the horse and cart transport carrying chalk from the old pit nearest Offham down to the wharf, which had been cut in the early 1800s to shorten the journey and make loading of barges easier. In 1807 a new quarry was opened by George Shiffner (behind the building now the Chalk Pit Pub). As this created an even longer journey he devised a plan for a funicular tramway to take wagons of chalk under the road and down the steep slope directly to the waiting barges. Plans were drawn up by William Jessop and construction was completed in 1809. It was said to be the first railway in southern England and was way ahead of its time but sadly, by the end of the 19th century, it had fallen into disuse.

5 The Cut

The area around Hamsey church became virtually an island when a canal was dug by the Upper Ouse Navigation Company in 1790 to cut off the large river meander, known as the 'loop'. Called 'Mighell's Cut', Joseph Mighell had bought Hamsey Place Farm in 1777 and also operated the water mill. He was compensated for the destruction of his mill race and retired to the West country. The navigation with its 19 locks went 22 miles north as far as Upper Ryelands bridge, near Balcombe. Ironically almost the last commercial traffic contributed to its own demise - the carriage of bricks to build the Balcombe Viaduct to take the railway over the Upper Ouse Valley. Hamsey Lock had become impassable by 1868.

6 Lock Cottage and the Osier Beds

Situated on the eastern side of the cut below Hamsey Place Farm the cottage was built to house the keeper of the first lock on the Upper Ouse Navigation in the 1790s. After the demise of the canal the cottage became known as Osier Cottage, and in 1838 [Tithe] Christopher Spencer owned and occupied the cottage and adjoining Osier bed. In 1851 [Census] the occupier was John Tucker, a basketmaker. After that the cottage was occupied by farm labourers, no doubt working at Hamsey Place Farm: Henry Herriott, 1861; William Rhoades, 1871; Joseph Leicester, 1881; William Mason 1891 [Census]. In 1926 Harold Cannings lived at the cottage for a short time and tells of the floods that occurred regularly. Bert Windibank and his family, who had lived there prior to that, had to be rescued more than once and a boat was kept at the farm for this purpose.

During the 1920s there were osier beds (Pells on the map) opposite the cottage below Offham Church. They were worked by Sid Holdstock, a Lewes basketmaker.

7 Hamsey Place Farm

In 1838 [Tithe] the farm was in the tenancy of Henry Guy whose brother, Nathaniel was tenant at adjoining Cowleaze, both farms being in the ownership of Sir Charles Burrell. By 1851 [Census] Henry had died and his widow, Dorothy continued to run the farm which comprised 800 acres and employed 17 men and 6 boys. John Kenward, Jack Harmer's grandfather, took over both Hamsey Place and Cowleaze farms in 1888 bringing all his stock, equipment and possessions by road from Fletching. His Southdown sheep flock were his pride and joy and were grazed on Hamsey Sheep Down which ran from Offham over to the racecourse. They were tended by the shepherd who lived in the little cottage (now called Toll Cottage) the only property in Offham which went with the farm. A photo of the farm workers in the early 1900s shows he was employing 19 men and 6 boys! In the early 1920s his health failed and his son-in-law John Harmer managed the farms along with his own at Cooksbridge. By this time the sheep had gone and a milking herd was installed producing butter which was sold in Lewes. John Kenward died in 1929 and the farm was sold to Ralph Botting who continued until the mid 1970s when the farm returned to the possession of the Harmers.

8 Hamsey Church and Manor

It is believed there was a Saxon settlement at Hamsey. The first known record refers to Athelstan holding a 'Gemotte at Ham near Lewes' in 925 A.D. This was a court of enquiry to settle local disputes. It is next referred to in the Domesday book (1080) where 'Ralph(de Cheyney) holds Hame of William (de Warenne). Uleeva held it of King Edward. It was then assessed at 25 hides; it is now rated at 14 hides; for the remainder, seven hides are included in the rape of Earl Mortain (Pevensey); and four hides with-hold half a rood land in the rape of Earl Roger, (Arundel). At the present period the moiety of Ralph pays land tax for 13 hides; the arable is 13 plough lands; there are two ploughs in the desmesne, and 16 villains, and 14 Bondsmen, with 10 ploughs. There is a Church, 200 acres of meadow, a wood of 10 hogs, and 13 shillings of herbage. Hugh holds one hide of this district. Ralph half a hide. The total value in the reign of the Confessor was £20. It has since been reduced to £10, at which sum it is now estimated.'

There was probably a wooden church in Saxon times which was demolished and rebuilt in stone and flint by the de Cheyneys, the Tower being added in the fourteenth century. In 1189 the estate passed to the de Says through the marriage of Geoffrey to Alice de Cheyney. The de Says held the Manor for 200 years and not only gave Hamsey its name but also built a Hall in 1321 for which the contract still survives. The Hall, measuring 60 by 30 feet stood to the east of the church in what is now the extended graveyard. Subsequent Lords of the Manor included the de Clinton, Willoughby, Dudley, Lewknor, Alford and Wenham families. In 1776 it passed to Thomas Whalley Partington of Offham and around 1900 to Lord Monk Bretton.

There is no evidence (records or archaeology) to suggest that there was ever a village south of the church or that it was deserted due to the plague. If there were a larger settlement it was probably in the area around Hamsey House.

Note the weather vane on the church tower. The initials HS/WL refer to Henry Shiffner and William Lambe who were churchwardens in 1848 and may have been responsible for the existing tower roof.

9 Dismantled railway and the old line

The Lewes and Uckfield Railway Company opened the line to Uckfield in 1858. There was a daily service of five trains each way but only three on Sundays. The following year management of the line was transferred to the LBSCR. For the first ten years the line ran from a point on the Lewes/Wivelsfield line just south of Hamsey crossing to a point at the north end of the cut. However, this meant that through trains had to reverse out of Lewes Station to continue on to Brighton. In 1868 a new track was built giving access to Lewes from the east. At the Lewes end it crossed the 'loop' south of the church before passing through a cutting under the road to the church. It continued on an embankment to another bridge at the top end of the cut before joining the original line. The line was axed in the Beeching era of the 1960s and the last train ran on 23rd February 1969. The cutting was then used as a landfill site and subsequently has had vents installed to allow the escape of methane gas!