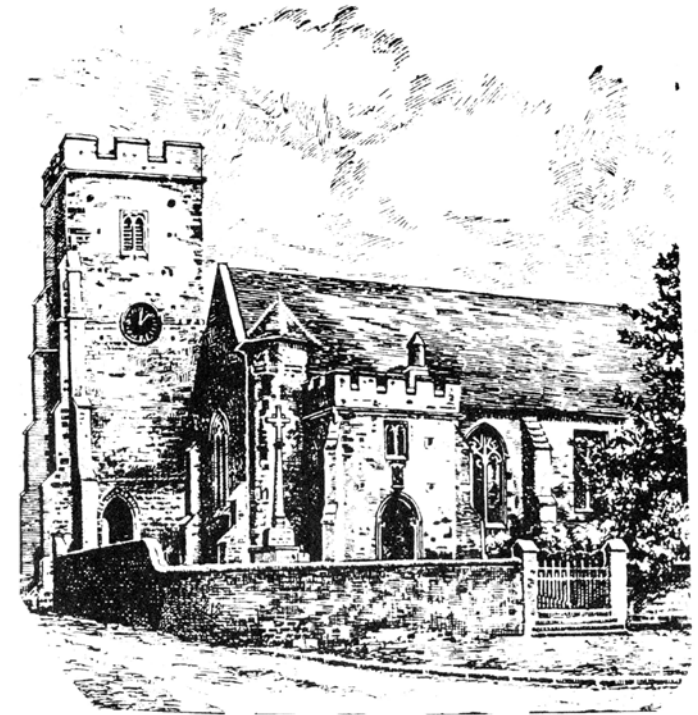
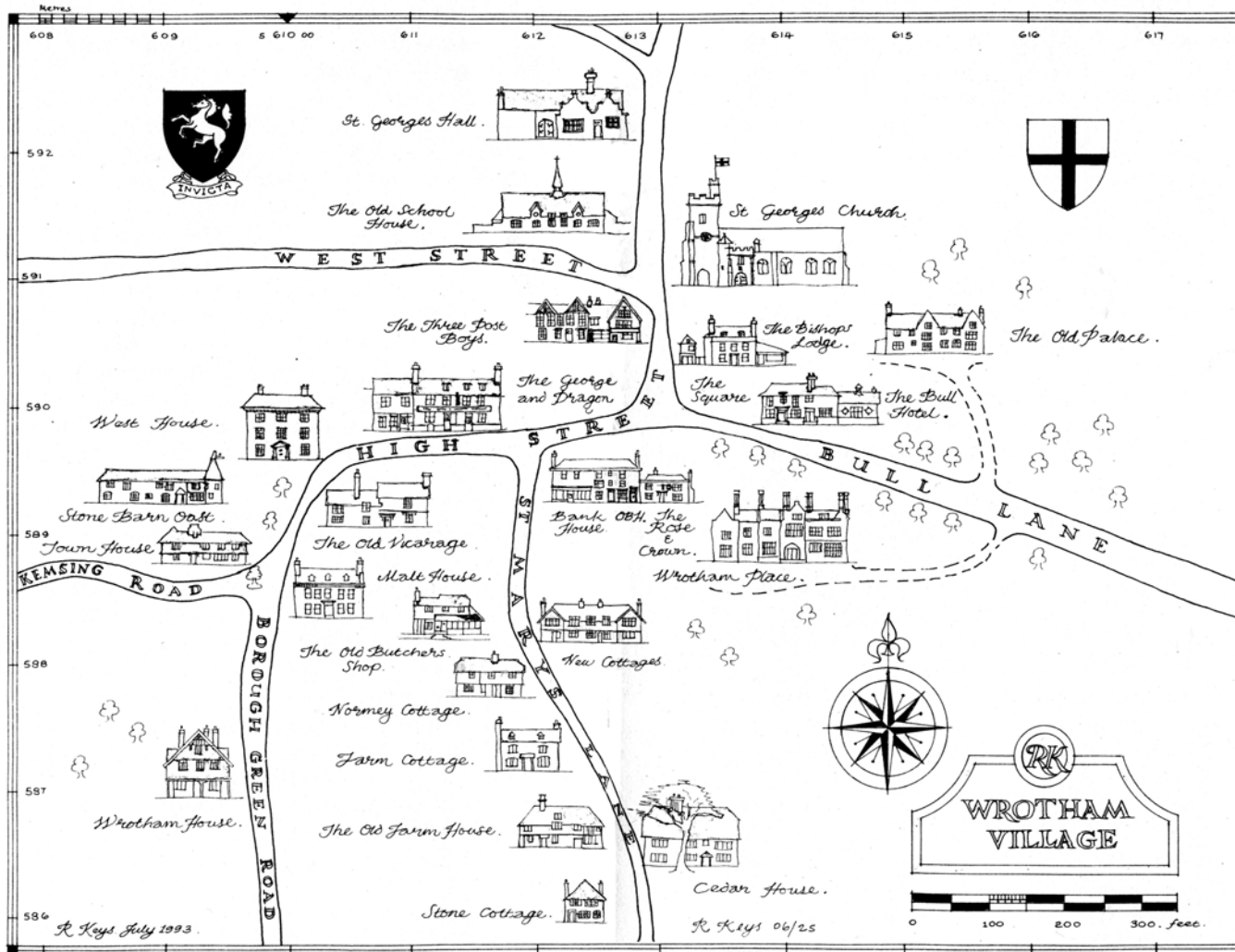


A VILLAGE WALK



St George's Church

Produced by Maysel Dawson for Wrotham Parish Council

Map by Roger Keys

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WROTHAM

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he first record of the name of **WROTHAM** is in a Charter by which King Offa of Mercia granted Addington, Trottscliffe, and Stansted to Rochester in AD788. In the earliest days of Christianity, when the two great cathedral cities of Winchester and Canterbury were being built, it was a custom of the Monks to make pilgrimages from one Cathedral to another, and the Pilgrims Way came into being. Houses where the Monks could stop were erected along the route, and these were nearly always at the intersection of roads, near hamlets, so that the dangers of molestation and robbery were lessened. Even before pilgrim days this route was used as a trade route, and would have led to the coastal beaches of Kent.

As you approach **WROTHAM** from Borough Green you will see **THE OLD VICARAGE**. This 17th Century house, originally a Hall House with later additions, was once the home of Lord Hardinge of Lahore born during his father's curacy. On the bend in the High Street you notice **WEST HOUSE** a beautiful Queen Anne house which has a fire mark on the wall - this insured good attention by the fire brigade in the last Century.

At this point look up the High Street and notice the various buildings - the architectural quality of Wrotham is best appreciated here where two storey shops and dwellings appearing to be generally of 18/19th Century in origin, are in many instances built around much older structures dating back to the 14th Century or earlier, Walls as architectural features contribute much to the character of the village.

Continue up the High Street viewing the church as you pass the junction. On the right you will pass **WROTHAM PLACE**, which was once a royal lodge. It was here that Henry VIII awaited the news of Anne Boleyn's execution. Thomas Nyssel, an early owner, is buried in the Church. The date of 1498 was found carved in the rafters of the stables. You may notice a pigeon house in the grounds - these were permitted by charter to large landowners so that the pigeons could feed on their owners corn and not on other peoples.



Opposite Wrotham Place on a wall towards the Bull Hotel is a plaque which describes how, in 1759 Colonel Shadwell was "shot to the heart" by deserters. There is a memorial to the Colonel in Maidstone Church. The deserters were caught and hanged at Penenden Heath.

The **BULL HOTEL** became an Inn in 1280 and is one of the oldest hostelries in the country. In recent years, and during the last war, pilots from Biggin Hill made this one of their favourite watering holes, and at one time the ceiling was decorated with the signatures of most of the famous "Battle of Britain" pilots.

Most of the **OLD PALACE** was pulled down in the mid 14th Century by Archbishop Islip and taken to Maidstone, where the new palace was built beside the river. Considerable rebuilding has taken place over the last few years, and it is now a splendid re-creation of its former glory.

Retrace your steps to the junction and look towards the church - you will see a selection of fine buildings either side of the road adding excitement and interest to the aspect.

ST. GEORGE'S HOUSE, on the left, was in the last century a Temperance Hotel, which is next to the Three Post Boys, a former public house. **BISHOPS LODGE** has interesting features - once the home of the Spencer family who farmed and lived also at **WROTHAM PARK** outside the village, which was once the home of the Byng family.

Next comes our **CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE** which dates principally from the 13th and 15th Century and was the site of the first church built here in the middle of the 10th Century.

The 15th Century tower is remarkably fine in its proportions, and is all the more impressive because from its position close to the road it rises directly and seems to dominate the whole village. The clock was made early in the 17th Century and is probably one of the oldest church clocks in the country. It is still in excellent mechanical order.

A separate leaflet is available in the church giving full detail of the contents and history. Proceed from church, passing the Church Hall, on your left, and several interesting cottages on the right. Notice the Lych Gate at the junction of the Old London Road, and on the left you will see **COURT LODGE**. This was once the Rectory, and during the curacy of Reverend Moore (who we understand was more interested in entertaining than his church duties!) is said to have played host to Jane Austen whilst she was writing "Pride and Prejudice". There is an artesian well in the garden. This was once used as the village pump.

Pass the recreation ground on the right and walk up the Old London Road and you will come to **PILGRIM COTTAGE** on the right. This was once a rest house for pilgrims and then became a **TURNPIKE HOUSE**. In 1852 it became the Wrotham Lock up, and bars at the windows are still in place.

In 1620 an encampment of huts was known to be on the Pilgrims Way at this point, and an old map drawn by hand shows it to be known as "**SLUTS ACRE**". An archery existed at **BUTTS HILL** further up this road and a practice range was in the Chalk Hill nearby.

Leaving the Lych Gate on your left you will soon find the lovely old Cricket Ground, (Wrotham is one of the earliest venues where the game was played) which is the start of a Circular Walk published by Tonbridge and Malling Council (Leisure Services Department).

When you return through the village you may like to wander down St. Mary's Road, once called Donkey Lane. Old Cottages at the top are named after one of the old potters, Hubble, then the Almshouses bequeathed by Miss Helen Betenson follow. There are houses here covering every Century and at the very end **CEDAR HOUSE** built in 1490 still houses the old blacksmith forge.

West of the village is the road called **BATTLEFIELDS** which recalls the **BATTLE OF BLACKSOLE FIELD**, fought in 1554 between Thomas Wyatt's supporters and the troops of Queen Mary I on Blacksole Field, during Wyatt's anti-papist rebellion.

17th Century pottery, made in Wrotham is known throughout the world. The kilns were situated a short half mile north of Wrotham Station and made mostly slipware. The pots were called **TYGS** and can be seen in Maidstone Museum.

