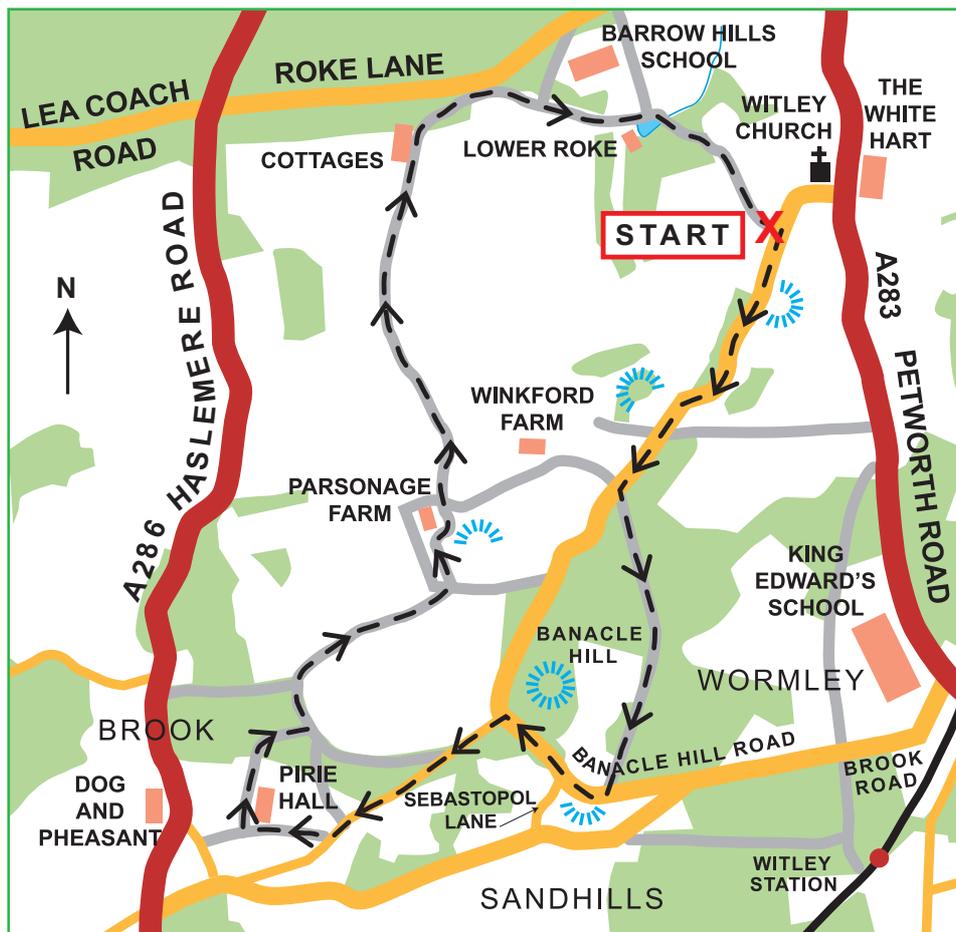




Walk 7

Banacle Hill and The Semaphore



-  ROADS
-  ROADS
-  FOOTPATHS & TRACKS
-  ROUTE OF WALK
-  WOODED AREAS
-  BUILDINGS
-  RAILWAY LINE
-  VIEWPOINTS

Map: OS Explorer 133 – Haslemere & Petersfield

Start: Car park in Church Lane, Witley - by letter box. Busy during church services and during school drop-off & pick-up times.

Grid Ref: SU945396

Distance: 4 miles

Terrain: Woodland Trust site, Brook, has several fallen trees to climb over..

Refreshments: The Dog & Pheasant, Brook, or the White Hart, Witley.



Walk 7

Banacle Hill and The Semaphore

Directions

Leave the car park, cross over Church Lane and go up the drive towards Church Lane House. The footpath leaves the drive at the bend and runs to the right of the cream house and garden, with the lane beneath you on the right. The path emerges with intermittent views over Witley recreation ground and beyond. (The view is particularly good from the bench along here, from which you can see Hydon's Ball).

Continue along the ridge, Culmer Hanger, and out on to the road where you will pass a house called Hangerfield almost immediately on your left. Follow the lane to a gatepost on the right marked Winkford Grange. To the right of this is a metal gate from which there are glorious views towards Charterhouse and the Hogs Back.

Culmer Hanger is named after the ancient farmstead, Culmer Farm, on the Petworth Road below. This farm is mentioned in documents of the 14th century and is possibly much older. The garden at Hangerfield was the first one to be designed by Gertrude Jekyll.

Continue on along the lane past Winkford Lodge on the right. Just before a farm track on the right, take a bridleway on your left which cuts downhill into the woods. Ignore any tracks off to the left of the bridleway and continue straight on.

This well used path runs beneath Banacle Common and bluebells spill on to the path in early May. In the days before mechanised farming, the woods on either side of the path were arable land. On the right, the fields were called Upper Bannicle, Middle Bannicle and Lower Bannicle going south. The land on the left is part of the grounds of King Edward's School. The school was founded in 1553 and moved from London to Witley in 1867. During WW2, the Admiralty occupied the school and it was here that radar was developed. After the war ended, the MOD built

a research establishment in the grounds of the school and the association with pioneering radar research continued here with the Natural Environment Research Council's development of GLORIA for sea bed mapping.

The path narrows as it runs between woodland gardens. The path emerges on the gravel drive to Banacle Edge on the left and Woodbury Cottage on the right. Keep straight on and at the narrow road, turn right. There are some fabulous views to your left as you come out of the trees.

Roe deer can often be seen here. This hamlet of Sandhills has changed little since it was the inspiration for painters in the 19th century. Helen Allingham lived here and painted many of the cottages. The artist W.G. Robertson also lived here at the end of the 19th century. He owned the land and cottages, and left most of the cottages to his tenants on his death. In 1935 Sandhills Common was acquired by the National Trust.

At the grass triangle, with Sebastopol Lane going down to the left, continue up the lane past Broomhill on your left.

*To the right, in the grounds of Woodbury, on the edge of Banacle Hill a Semaphore station was built in 1822 for rapid communication between the Admiralty in London and Portsmouth. The semaphore took only twenty minutes to communicate the 75 miles between London and Portsmouth, which previously took a messenger on horseback about 6 hours. The semaphore operated a system of shutters from a four-storey building with a 30ft timber mast. William Cobbett, in his *Rural Rides of 1823*, made uncomplimentary comments about this contraption. George Blurton lived here as the semaphore operator in 1841. It was last used in December 1847. A radio mast now stands on the site of the semaphore tower.*

At the road junction at the top of the hill turn left into Church Lane (again) and walk about 600 yards along the lane past Banacle Field on the right and Fintry on the left. After the road levels, ignore the first footpath through a metal kissing gate on the right, which is partially obscured, and look carefully for the second one on the right. This is just before the fenced garden to a Victorian house and a telegraph pole and large oak tree mark the entrance.

The house is the old Brook School house, built in 1882 by the Haslemere surveyor and architect, John Penfold.

Follow the path behind some woodland gardens on the left until it emerges at the Pirrie Hall in Brook.

The land and hall were donated by the Viscount Pirrie in 1923. Lord Pirrie was controller of the White Star shipping line which operated the largest passenger liners in the world, including the Titanic. He owned Witley Park, just across the A286, then called Lea Park. Brook and the country around, as far south as Gibbet Hill, were owned by Lord Pirrie until his death in 1924.

For refreshments, head down the drive towards the Dog & Pheasant pub.

This, along with Goose Cottage and Sister Cottage, early 15th century, is one of the earliest remaining buildings in Brook.

Otherwise, go right, crossing in front of the Pirrie Hall and head straight uphill towards the trees, past the tennis courts and children's play area. A bench marks the footpath into the woods. This is Heath Hill Woodland Trust land. Go behind the bench, uphill towards the oak and veer right uphill past two more oak trees. (The path is not very distinct here particularly when the leaves have fallen in the Autumn). The footpath soon becomes a little clearer and passes between old fallen trees and under a canopy of further fallen trees. Continue to follow the path over several fallen trees to the top of the hill. Eventually you will come out onto a footpath bordering a field. This is the Greensand Way (a long distance path that runs from Haslemere to Kent). Turn left and when you come to a junction of paths turn right on to a bridleway. Soon after, ignore a footpath to the left.

This path, known as Blind Lane, meanders between the fields and was the main route from Witley to Brook until the 19th century. Wild flowers fill the path. The telephone mast on Banacle Hill can be seen between the trees. The field on the right occupies what was once the west part of Banacle Common.

Emerge at a cluster of houses by a junction of paths. For a shorter route, take the track to the right to Church Lane, at which a left turn will take you back along Church Lane to the start of the walk.

For a longer walk . . .

Turn left on to the track between Parsonage Farm Bungalow and Parsonage Farm Cottages. Just before a metal gate across the track, take the permitted footpath to your right through a kissing gate and into the field. From here there is a splendid view north to the Hogs Back. Keeping to the left side follow the path downhill through the field to a second kissing gate at the further edge.

Looking to your left at this point, you will see Parsonage Farm through the trees. In the mid 19th century, Parsonage Farm, along with much of Brook and Sandhills, was owned by Edward Leech of Lea. Richard Whitbourn, the Witley maltster, lived at Parsonage Farm. The Whitbourn family owned Enton Mill from 1838 to 1898 when it closed. On your right, as you proceed through the fields, is Winkford Farm which dates back to at least 1359 and is possibly earlier.

Continue straight on across the fields along the fenced path to eventually arrive at a stile and cottages.

Cross over the stile and follow the path through the hedge opposite. Pass in front of the cottages to your left. Follow the rubble track uphill until a road comes into view around a bend in the track. Bear right at this point through the trees, following a path to a clearing and a row of houses. Go past all the houses on your right and at the far end, squeeze along a narrow footpath straight ahead. The path slopes down through undergrowth past the back of Barrow Hills School on your left to Lower Roke at the bottom of the valley on your right. Cross the track here and continue straight ahead along the footpath which borders the lake of Lower Roke on your right.

This lake was not here in 1768 but a small pond is shown higher up the valley. It is likely the stream was dammed to control the flow down to the turnpike road at Wheeler Street. The scene was painted by H. Sutton Palmer in the early 20th century but was misspelt, Roarke Farm.

Follow the path around the edge of the lake to the brick steps at the end. At the top of the steps, turn left and follow the path up through the trees. Continue ahead along this path with some houses on your left until you emerge at Witley Lodge and the car park at the start.

Witley Lodge was built in 1912 by Lord Pirrie, marking the edge of the Witley Park Estate.

It is recommended that you visit the 12th century Witley Parish Church. The White Hart pub is a short walk down the lane.

