

Chaldon Walks

Chaldon residents walked each of its footpaths regularly twice a year from the 1920s until a few years ago. There are seven walks of varying lengths designed to cover the network of official paths and bridleways within the parish. This is an attempt to preserve that tradition and provide some interesting detail. Put together by Liz Bonsall with contributions from Adele Brand, Madeline Hutchins and Lizzy Maskey. May 2020. Revised March 2026.

Chaldon Walk 3 – Village Hall, Church Lane, Piles Wood, Happy Valley, the Golf Course, Leazes Avenue and Rook Lane. 2.3 miles, approximately 1 hour. The walk can be picked up at various points on the circuit.



Map created by Martin Lubikowski, ML Designs, Chaldon

Start at Chaldon Village Hall car park, and just a note about the Village Hall itself, before we set off. The Hall was built as a Peace Memorial after the First World War by public subscription, part destroyed in WW2 and rebuilt with the generosity of the people of Chaldon. The car park was added in 1932. **For the walk, with your back to the Hall facing north, take the footpath in the right hand corner of the car park.** To your left was the site of the first Scout Hut erected in 1950. The Scouts moved to Six Brothers Field in 1973. The path passes through meadows mostly used for horse grazing. This valley is a natural water course. The field to the left can become a small lake in times of high rainfall as happened in 2019.

Walk alongside a high fence then the path turns sharply to the west with Longlands on your left, shielded by a beech hedge. On your right is a small field, the home of a Forest School. The Tithe map of 1825 shows that the lands to the left were Upper and Lower Longlands and the land to the right was Glebe land (belonging to the Church).

As you reach Church Lane look up at the splendid beech tree then **turn right to walk down the lane.** This is an ancient north south route and quite sunken. Notice the tree roots on the high banks.

Passing two new build houses on your right notice the splendid trees in the lane, including sycamore, beech and oak, the oldest planted in the 18th century. You have now entered Chaldon Conservation Area. Conservation areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Chaldon Conservation area covers the Church, Court Farm and Chaldon Court, the former Rectory, and houses and cottages in Church Lane and Doctors Lane that mostly date back to before 1914. Amongst the trees on your left is The Rookery, a late 18th century house with possibly medieval cellars. Once called The Firs (spot one wonderful remaining very tall fir tree) it has had a varied history from gentleman farmer, London businessman, hospital outreach accommodation and residential home, now a private house. Hops were once grown in the fields to the south of the house. From 1956 it was a mink farm then a kennels. Rookery Cottage was once the gardener's cottage.

Opposite is Little Glebe, a 20th century house that featured in the Ideal Home Exhibition in the 1950s. Continue along Church Lane and notice Wood House on your left. Wood House was once called Chimawan, before that Greenshaw and originally The Nest. On the right is Garden Cottage, once stables to the Rectory.

Glebe House was the Parsonage or Rectory and in the Hearth Tax returns for 1664 had 4 hearths. The oldest part of the current house, the section with two windows either side of the front door and chimneys at either end, was built in 1760. It has had several large additions. In 1926 the new rectory was built in Doctors Lane and Glebe House became a private home and then a nursing home.

There is an avenue of very tall lime trees with seven trees along the roadside boundary of Glebe House. Can you see another seven?

Opposite Glebe House, on your left, is Rectory Cottage, originally built for the Rector's servant or coachman. From 1967 – 1984 it was used as a Parish Room.

Note the distinctive latticed windows and the date above the ground floor window on the gable end.

To your right is Doctors Lane. The red brick cottages you can see ahead of you are late 19th century farm cottages for Chaldon Court Farm (behind the Church and Chaldon Court). A little further up and set back from the road is Keepers Cottage, built in 1901 for the gamekeeper.

Continue straight ahead and before you reach the left hand lane there is a fingerpost almost hidden behind a tree, pointing east. Take this turn to the right and notice the wooden step on your right by the gate. What might this be for? Walk up the slope, with the fence on your right. Notice the view of Glebe House, Rectory Cottage, and the farm cottages. At one time there was a pond in the lower field at the corner of Doctors Lane and Church Lane, and this still gets very wet in winter. Note the flints in the field, while this area is on chalk, the soil here is 'clay with flints'. Ahead of you is Piles Wood and to your left in the distance is Figgs Wood. Piles Wood is semi-natural ancient woodland, famous for its bluebells. Passing by remnants of an ancient hedgerow and a large sycamore tree on your left, stop to look through the gap north-west across the fields towards Coulsdon. Look back and you can see the Conservation Area. **Continue straight on the path**, with the edge of Piles Wood on your left. Note the mix of native trees, including hawthorn, sycamore, holly, wild cherry, oak, and hazel. Dormice and a variety of bats are likely to live there as well as abundant birds, including great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches and jays and a cuckoo was last heard in 2019. At the end of the path you reach a T-junction and ahead of you is a fingerpost. **Turn left.**

Walk along the bridleway passing three modernised properties on your right and Piles Wood on your left. Piles Wood is designated by Natural England as semi-natural ancient woodland, although it does not show clearly on maps before 1805. It does have many ancient woodland indicators and is famous for its bluebells. In the wood is a mix of native trees, including hawthorn, sycamore, holly, wild cherry, oak and hazel. Dormice and a variety of bats are likely to live there as well as abundant birds, including great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, jays and owls and a cuckoo was last heard here in 2019. You can also see evidence of past woodland management, with multi-trunked hazels showing that they have been cut to ground level, or coppiced, to allow the harvesting of wood in a way that allows the tree to regrow to be harvested again and again (this was an important industry in Chaldon in the 17th century). You may see silver birch, rowan and goat or pussy willow at the edge of the wood. **At the end of the shingled track you reach Broadwood where you enter the wood to your left and take a narrow path downhill.**

As you follow this track look up at the magnificent high trees, including oaks, beech and pine. You can see laurel, a non-native, has 'invaded' the woods and on the ground spot the uprooted trees that are where they fell during the 1987 hurricane. Piles Wood links Chaldon with Happy Valley and in spring is carpeted with bluebells. In 2013 Merstham Estates undertook some woodland management and the restricted paths within the wood date from this time.

At the bottom of the hill you reach a fingerpost showing three directions. Look to your left and you look through Happy Valley to Farthing Downs. Happy Valley has

SSSI status and in 2019 was designated a National Nature Reserve, which reflects its huge importance for biodiversity.

Listen carefully and you will hear running water. This comes from the main sewer that runs along the bottom of the valley. **Take the path to the right going uphill signposted to Dean Hill.** Take care not to fall as the ground is littered with bits of glass and china. This area was once a Council rubbish tip and rain constantly washes the soil to reveal more fragments.

Continue up the hill ignoring small paths to left and right. On your left you will pass an old water tank. On your right look for an ivy covered tree and shortly after you will notice a path to the right and some old Victorian iron railings.

Take this path and continue south. This area is Dean Hill, known in ancient times as Dannehache, the ancient junction of the parishes of Caterham, Coulsdon and Chaldon. Once again you can see broken pottery and china. These are remnants from the former St Lawrence's Hospital. Occasionally you can find a clay pipe and often old bottles. The foundations you see are probably the remains of cattle sheds that are shown on old OS maps for the area.

Following the path, you are now walking along Dean Hill, arguably the site of an ancient Iron Age fort. At the first big gap in the hedge turn right and go through to see the expanse of what is now Surrey National Golf Course. Look west and you can see Broadwood. Look left (south west) and in the distance you can see a tall fir tree probably in Leazes Avenue and south you can see the Golf Clubhouse.

Return to the path and continue south between the hedges. You can still see iron railings on your left. Continue on the path until you reach a junction. Cross over through the gap opposite, then, after a few metres **take the right hand path.** This goes downhill and can become quite narrow. Continue until you reach a junction and turn right. In front of you up the hill is Surrey National Golf Clubhouse and in the valley to your right is a man-made lake. The Golf Course was opened in 1996 and the landscape sympathetically designed retaining many of the splendid trees and woodlands. Dormice live in the hedgerows and occasionally you can glimpse birds such as linnets, redwings and green woodpeckers. The ponds attract toads, moorhens and the occasional heron.

Climb the hill. Half way up the hill, pause to look back. You will see some tall black pines and these define the area surrounding the former St. Lawrence's Hospital Burial Ground. The land has belonged to Chaldon Village Council since 2012 and is managed by the Downlands Management Trust and local volunteers. To the left of the trees you can see the tops of houses at the Village, once the Guards Depot. To the right you can see the houses of Yorke Gate, Hambledon Park and Oakgrove. Up until the 1990s this skyline was dominated by the Victorian institution of St. Lawrence's Hospital. Continuing up the hill you reach a junction with the car park to your left and clubhouse to the right. **Cross the road to the signpost and follow the BW sign into the wood.**

Once again take the path down a steep hill through woodland. On your right is a quarry like area heavily wooded. This was once a lime quarry for the farmlands. **Follow the path uphill between two hedges until you reach the road.** You are

now in Leazes Avenue. Ahead of you and on the right is a row of giant Wellingtonias. These were planted in the 1880s by James Banks Taylor who owned Fryern and all the lands that are now a golf course and as far west as Doctors Lane. It is said that he planned a grand entrance to Fryern.

Walk along Leazes Avenue and look for a fingerpost on your left. This is Footpath (FP)3 linking Leazes Avenue with Rook Lane. Take this narrow path between a high fence and a hedge and you will then pass along the edge of Tyhurst and Fryern Broom Woods with the golf course to your left. In the woods, you will see more coppiced hazels (as in Piles Wood), and in the spring some of Chaldon's loveliest bluebell displays. The area to the right (west) of the path is listed as Fryern Fields potential Site of Nature Conservation Importance. There are some wonderful trees beside and stretching over the path. Look up into the canopy of a few of them. There are oaks, and wild cherries. The wild cherries have strong horizontal banding in their bark, and lovely white blossom in the spring. There is one tree over the path with a very bizarre branch that folds to and fro. See if you can spot it. Tawny owls, bank voles and weasels live in the woodland.

As you reach the main road you pass alongside a high fence. This shields the footpath from Chaldon Mead, once the site of a hostel for some of the residents of St. Lawrence's Hospital. In 2012 it became a private site of five executive homes. At the end of the path is a gap to the road. To the left the path continues parallel with the road and leads east towards Caterham. The short length of path is known as Jubilee Walk and was constructed by the Village Council in 2012.

Cross the road with care and turn right. Walk east up Rook Hill. On your left is Highwood, once home to Cllr. Eleanor Marshall, O.B.E. (1905-2004). Miss Marshall managed a chicken farm at Highwood. Her reminiscences of life in Chaldon can be read in the Bourne Society's Chaldon Village History. On your right is Tyhurst, the woodlands once open meadowland and the house once the home of notorious Sir Leo Chiozza Money (1870-1944), a parliamentarian involved in the Hyde Park Scandal (1928).

At the top of the hill you reach Rook Farm, an 18th century flint house worked as a farm until around 1950. The five bay timber framed thatched barn is a conspicuous feature of this part of Chaldon. Notice the rook perched on the roof.

To walk to the Village Hall continue along the pavement with the flint and brick wall on your left and look for the date engraved in the first brick pillar of the wall at the corner of the barn. Just past the bus stop and to your left is a small copse planted by residents as a small wildlife haven. The grass verge between the footpath and the road is planted with daffodils and wild flowers. On your left are the fields of Woodside where you can see rare sheep, goats and alpacas.

As you walk along the pavement you will see a lower pavement. This was extended in 2015 to improve safety and access for children attending St Peter & St Paul School. In 2026 there is a project to create parking bays in this wide verge to accommodate the needs of the school, now enlarged from an Infant to a Primary School.

Further and to the right you will notice another thatched property, this time Rook Cottage whose upstairs windows just peep above the hedge. The house is late 16th century, timber framed with Merstham stone on walls and chimney. It was newly thatched c.2015. Rook Cottage was the home of the first school in Chaldon with Sarah Russell listed as School Mistress in the census of 1851. Her grave is marked in the churchyard with a wooden grave board, one of very few remaining in Surrey.

A little further and you come to St Peter & St Paul Primary School on your left and then the Legrew Memorial Hall, known as the Village Hall. The clock on the north face was installed in 1949 as a memorial to the men of Chaldon who lost their lives in WW2, their families and the people of Chaldon. In 2015 the Village Council paid for the clock to be automated, the original mechanism needing to be wound each week.

Before leaving make sure you walk towards the front door of the Village Hall and read the memorial stone to the Legrew family on the left of the entrance.

Cross the road to the car park and before you leave look back to the right of the Hall. Goswell Cottage was built in 1878. Notice the latticed windows. Next to it is the old School House, built in 1871, in use as the school until 1965 and now a private house. The old school bell still hangs on the outside wall.

End of walk.

To learn more about the history of Chaldon visit www.chaldonhistory.org.uk