



## Bodiam Castle & The Hundred Years War

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### Trail Summary

Trail : SUSSTR0027  
Activity : Walk  
Type : History  
Author : John Wilks  
Distance : 3.4 miles / 5.4 kms  
Ascent : 236 feet / 72 metres  
Location : TQ795246 / TN32 5TE

This short walk starts in the quiet village of Ewhurst Green, and gently descends through fields to the River Rother, with fine views of Bodiam Castle. It then follows the river bank to reach the castle itself, before returning across rolling fields to the start. Walking is gentle, with one easy descent and one easy ascent.

The trail has been taken from the book *Walks into History: Sussex* by John Wilks. It has been reproduced with the kind permission of the publisher, Countryside Books.



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### Historical Background

The castle of Bodiam, completed in 1388, represents the final and most perfect phase of medieval castle design in England, but it never saw action as a fortress.

The castle's founder was a Sussex knight, Sir Edward Dalyngrigge. Born the son of minor landowning gentry near East Grinstead, he went as a soldier to seek fame and fortune in France during the early campaigns of the Hundred Years War. His bravery was rewarded with a knighthood by King Edward III and he returned to England both famous and rich with plunder taken from the French. In 1377, now a man of some importance in the country, he married Elizabeth Wardeux, heiress to the manor of Bodiam. This added still further to Sir Edward's wealth and standing, and he became an important figure in the government of Sussex.

The Hundred Years War was not a period of continual fighting but rather sporadic campaigns by the English across the plains of northern France and intermittent French raids upon the southern coast of England. In 1372 the English had lost control of the Channel, Rye was sacked by the French in 1377, and Winchelsea in 1380. The River Rother, which in those days was navigable as far inland as Bodiam, provided an inviting route into the heart of Sussex for French warships, and so in 1385 Sir Edward was given permission by King Richard II to fortify his manor house.

Instead, Sir Edward decided to start from scratch and build a castle which would not only meet the King's requirement for a stronghold to defend a vulnerable spot on the coast, but would also provide a residence suitable for a man of his wealth and standing. The result was the magnificent edifice seen today.

The castle was never put to the test. By the time of its completion, the English had regained control of the Channel and French raids ceased. The castle did however serve as a home and headquarters for Sir Edward until his death in 1395, and later for his son John.



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### The Walk

1. With your back to the White Dog Inn, turn right and walk along the village street, passing the church and a side lane on your left. Soon pass 'The Old Library' on your right, and 20 yards later, turn right through a kissing gate. Walk down the left-hand side of the field. At the bottom of the slope, just before trees, turn left through a kissing gate, partly hidden behind a holly bush. Cross the stile ahead and turn half-left along the field edge, with the fence on your right, to reach a stile beside a metal field gate, to the right of a tumbled-down shed. Keep straight on down the next field, with the fence still on your right, to reach a stile in the field bottom, at a signpost.
2. Cross the stile and turn right for 40 yards to go over a footbridge in the field corner. Ignore a gate and concrete bridge on your left, but keep ahead, with the hedge on your left. Soon a barn comes into sight ahead. Cross a footbridge in front of the barn and keep ahead along the side of the barn to a metal field gate in front of the railway. Turn left for 5 yards and cross a stile beside a metal gate. Immediately turn right to carefully cross the railway line via two stiles.
3. Turn right, with the railway immediately on your right, to reach the corner of the field. Here turn left and walk towards the castle, with a hedge now on your right, aiming towards a prominent metal gate. At the gate turn left along an embankment on the river bank. At the end of the embankment, cross a stile onto a road and turn right across the bridge. At the end of the bridge turn right, signed 'footpath to castle'. Cross the car park and go through a gate onto a broad path leading to the castle (the ticket office is on the far side). Between February and October Bodiam Castle is open daily from 10 am to 6 pm (or dusk); between November and January it opens on Saturday and Sunday, 10 am to 4 pm. There is an admission charge; free to National Trust members.

*Bodiam Castle represented the culmination of medieval military architecture, before the advent of gunpowder made all the defences that had gone before redundant. Unlike traditional Norman castles, Bodiam does not consist of a separate keep and encircling walls. Instead, the walls are the castle. They are massive in order to withstand bombardment, with a strong circular tower at each corner, defended by a wide moat to disrupt assault and to prevent the undermining of the walls, and with overhanging parapets with holes set into their floors, through which missiles could be dropped on any attackers who reached the walls. The central tower you first see as you approach the castle is only the postern gate: the main entrance with its massive gatehouse is on the opposite side of the castle. There was a small harbour in front of the postern gate, providing safe anchorage beneath the castle walls for sea-going ships. On the outer wall of the postern is carved a shield, that of Sir Robert Knollys, under whom Sir Edward served when fighting in the French War.*

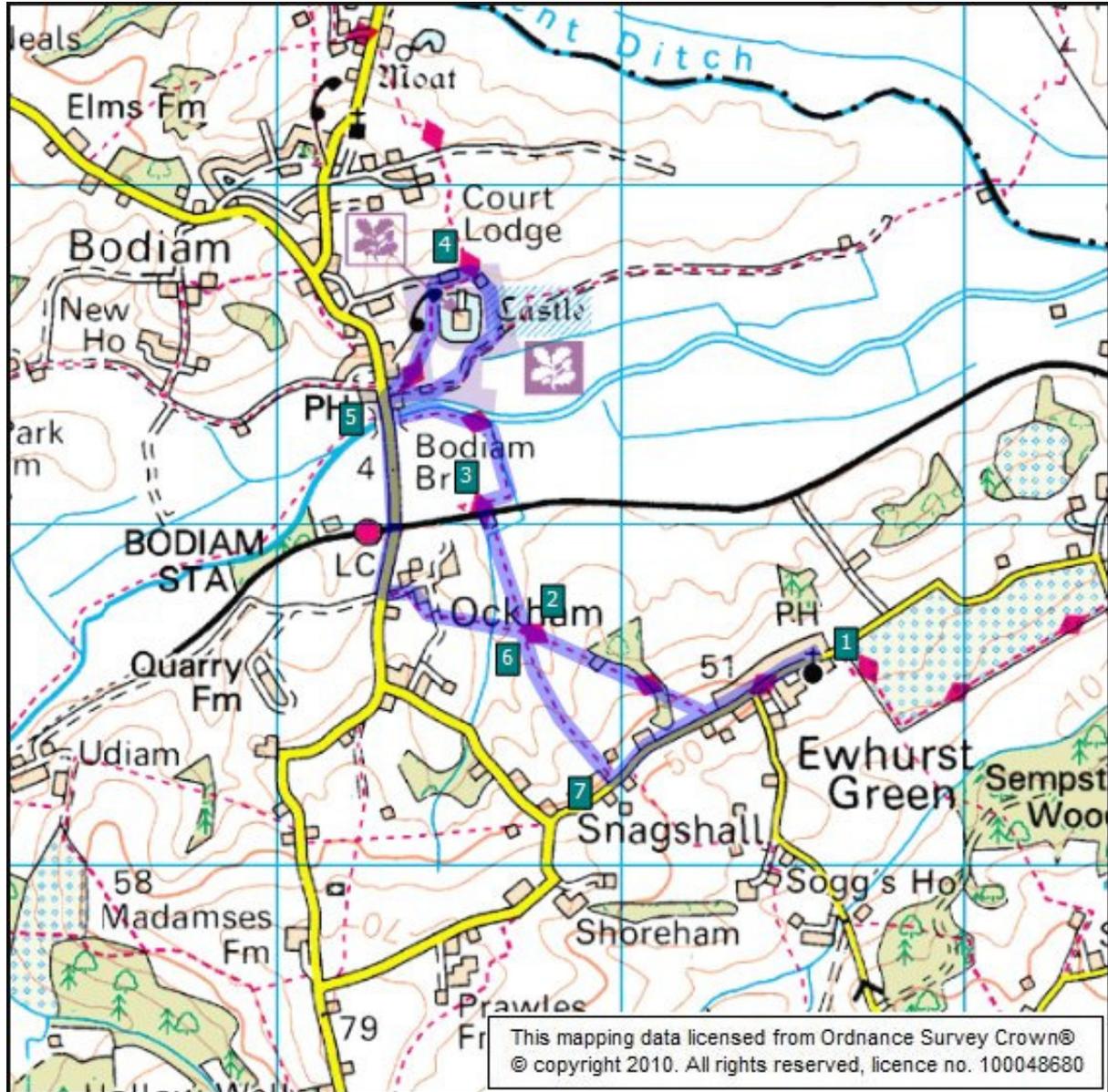
*However, Bodiam was never used against the French, its intended foe. For a century it was home to the Dalyngriggues and their successors, the Lewknors. In 1483 it was briefly held by Sir Thomas Lewknor against King Richard III, but he surrendered without a fight. It was reduced to a ruin in 1643 by Parliamentary forces during the Civil War, to prevent its use by the Royalists.*

Bear left and walk around the castle to reach the gatehouse.

*The main gatehouse has three drawbridges, defended by two fortified bridgeheads or barbicans as well as the gatehouse itself. On the outside face of the gatehouse are carved three shields. The central shield is that of Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, and to its left is the shield of the Wardeux family. The third shield bears the arms of the Radynden family, relatives of Sir Edward.*

4. Follow the footpath around the moat and return to the car park. Continue out to the road opposite the Castle public house.
5. Turn left along the road and recross the bridge. Continue along the lane for 350 yards to cross the railway at a level crossing. Continue up the lane for a further 200 yards. Opposite the drive to Quarry Farm, turn left into a drive, with a high stone wall on your right and hedge on your left. Emerge from the enclosed drive, with a wooden fence on your left and an oast house in front. Immediately turn right over a stile. Cross the field to a stile opposite, just in front of a telegraph pole. Go half-left across the corner of the next field to another stile. Cross the stile and continue ahead down the field, with the fence on your left and the houses of Ewhurst Green seen on the skyline ahead. In the bottom corner of the field go through a gate and turn right for 5 yards to a stile and footbridge. Cross the footbridge and bear left towards the stile and signpost, passed on your outward journey.
6. Cross the stile and immediately turn right. Walk uphill, with the fence close on your right. In the top right-hand corner of the field, cross a stile beside a gate and walk up an enclosed track, passing a house on your left.
7. On reaching a lane, turn left and follow it back into Ewhurst Green.

### Trail Map



### Location

The walk starts in Ewhurst Green, which is on a minor road, 2 miles south of Bodiam and 3 miles west of Northiam. There is plentiful roadside parking in the village, but please park with consideration for the residents.