

# Loose Village - history trail

**THE WALK BEGINS AT LOOSE GREEN.**

**Distance:** about one mile. Allow 1-2 hours for a leisurely stroll.

## **HOW TO GET HERE**

### **BY BUS**

Arriva buses **5** (Maidstone–Hastings), **59** (Maidstone–Grafty Green) and **89** (Maidstone–Coxheath) stop at Loose Green.

### **BY CAR**

Loose is 2½ miles south of Maidstone on the A229. Park on Old Loose Hill or at Loose Green.



**Loose Green.** The green is the open space at the junction of the A229 and Old Loose Hill.

The Post Office and General Store is the sole survivor of a row of three village shops that overlooked the green. Nearby, alongside the A229, is the former King's Arms pub, now part of a new residential development.

The **oak tree** replaced Loose's original 'Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Oak', which died soon after it was planted in 1897.

The slip-road shaded by the tree was part of a public transport terminus for trams from 1907 to 1930, trolleybuses (1930 – 1967) and motor buses until the 1990s.



The **telephone kiosk** is a 'K6', a type introduced in 1936.



The **litter bin** and others like it in the village commemorate the centenary of Loose Parish Council.



The stepped **mounting block**, salvaged from a local orchard, is typical of several erected in this area many years ago for horse riders.

Now walk down **Old Loose Hill**, noting the walls, kerbs and gulleys built from Kentish ragstone, quarried locally from Roman times until the early 20th century.



Along the edge of the road are several **haul stones**, to which heavy wagons were hitched to prevent them slipping back down the hill as their horses hauled them to the top. Horses hired for this work were stabled at **The Change**, the medieval hall house halfway down the west side of the hill.



Among the houses on the east side of the hill are **Lime Tree House** (dated 1582), which in its time has been cottages, a shop and a pub; and a modern bungalow whose name, **Sugar Loaves**, was originally given to a beer house that stood here. The shapes of three sugar loaves can be seen on the front gate.

At the foot of the hill notice, on your left, the drive leading to **Vale House**, outwardly 18<sup>th</sup> century. The initials JA 1846 on one of its facing bricks are probably those of Joseph Amies, watermill superintendent.



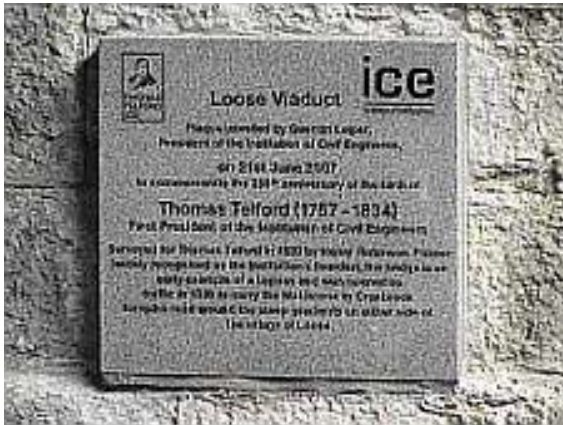
Just past the entrance to Vale House the **Loose Stream** flows through a **water trough** where horses and cattle slaked their thirst in days gone by.

Turn left into **Salts Lane** and note, on the corner, beside the yellow grit bin, an old **boundary stone** inscribed with the letter 'L'. It marks what was until 1887 a plot of land that belonged to East Farleigh parish.

Walk under **The Viaduct** (though really it is a single-arch bridge), which was opened in 1830 on what was then the Maidstone to Cranbrook Turnpike Road. Plaques on the stonework reveal its history.



On the other side of the road you will see another plaque commemorating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Telford's birth



Return to the foot of Old Loose Hill, turn right and walk along **Brooks Path**, between the former millpond and mill race which flowed on to Village Mill (demolished in the early 20th century).



Just beyond the viaduct, in the garden of **Mill Falls** on the left, a waterfall marks the site of Gurney's Mill, one of 13 watermills that once stood beside the Loose Stream.

Walk back under the viaduct. Notice how its arch amplifies the sound of the rushing water. For the rest of your walk you will nearly always be within sight or sound of a watercourse.

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Return to the water trough, cross the road, walk a few yards back up the hill and through the gate into **Brooks Field**.

From here there is a panoramic view of the village, with its houses of all ages clustered around All Saints' parish church.

A tree trunk in the field features a **carving of a pig**, reminding us that the name 'Loose' was probably derived from the old English word, 'Hlose', meaning 'a place of pigs'.

On your left, the garden with the step down to the stream is on the site of a medieval tannery. Further on, the little **waterfall** is fed by one of the Loose stream's many tiny tributaries. This one has never been known to dry up.



The picturesque and much-photographed timber-framed house across the pond on the right is **Tylers**, once three cottages. At the end of Brooks Path, ignore the turnings to the left (Church Street) and right (Kirkdale) and walk ahead into **Bridge Street**, thus named because of its little bridges over the mill race.



***Florence House**, on the corner of Bridge Street and Church Street, was once a shop.*

Down in the garden on your right is **The Dairy House**, which has been a smithy, beerhouse and dairy in times past. At the end of Bridge Street the mill race cascades down to the site of the waterwheel that powered Village Mill. To the right of the cascade is Brooklyn, formerly the **millers house**; to the left is Millbourne Cottage, previously the **millers stables**.

Turn left at the end of Bridge Street and walk up Mill Street to the junction of

Busbridge Road (right), Well Street (ahead) and High Banks (left). One of Loose's several forges stood on the corner of Busbridge Road. Opposite, on the corner of Well Street, is one of the many **dip wells** that supplied the village with constant cold running water all the year round!



The National Trust's 17th century **Wool House** dominates the corner. The house was restored in the 1920s by Col. J.C.B. Statham, a big game hunter.



It may once have been a warehouse for fleeces or woollen cloth and have had a tannery behind it. **Wool House Cottage**, a few yards up Well Street, is also owned by the National Trust and is thought to be about one hundred years older than Wool House.

Walk up High Banks, past 18th century **Randall's Row**, and turn left into Church Street. Over on your right is **Church House**, a late 15th or early 16th century hall house that may have been the parish's first parsonage. Ahead, between

the **village sign** and another **mounting block**, take the path into the churchyard of **All Saints' Church**. The sign depicts various aspects of Loose's heritage.



The **yew tree** enclosed by the railings on the right is at least 1,500 years old and is one of the oldest in England. Its trunk has a circumference of 33 feet 6 inches.



*Among the many interesting graves, tombs and vaults in the churchyard is the triple-faced **Charlton Memorial**, close to the church wall opposite the yew tree.*

The church's nave, chancel and tower were built before 1300 and restored in the 15th century. The porch and aisles are 19th century. The nave was rebuilt in 1878 after being damaged by a fire.

After passing the church entrance, bear left into the north side of the churchyard, which overlooks **The Old Vicarage**, home of Loose's parish priests from the 17th century until 1830.

Return to the top of Church Street. The big barn in front of you was once part of a complex of oast-houses.

Now bear left up High Banks for another panoramic view of the village. The gabled building in the foreground is the former **Loose Baptist Church**, built in 1888. Local resident John Barker, MP, founder of the famous department store in Kensington High Street, London, donated £1,000 to the church building fund.



At the junction of High Banks and Old Loose Hill a **metal sign** warns that the road is unsuitable for 'heavy motors, lorries & charabancs'. It is a replica of a sign that was erected here in the 1920s or 1930s and stolen many years later.

Turn left and walk down the hill, passing 17th, 18th and 19th century houses, one of which, **Olde Hill House**, with its timber-framing and decorative plasterwork, could have been transplanted here from stockbrokers' Surrey!

On the right, **Malthouse Hill** leads you up to Loose's first **village school**, now three houses.



*Olde Hill House*

Walk back to Old Loose Hill and turn left, to pass two more fine timber-framed properties.

The first is **Brook House**, reckoned to be some 600 years old.

Finally, the 17th century **Chequers Inn** is ideally situated for rest and refreshment before the steep climb back to Loose Green.



*Loose's first village school*



Return to Old Loose Hill and turn left into Church Street to visit the **cemetery**, opened in 1865. The **War Memorial** bears the names of 65 villagers who died while on active service in the two world wars.

The graves of three soldiers and a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force are marked by Commonwealth War Graves headstones.



*The Chequers*



Contributed by Noel Gibbons and Paul Tritton of the Loose Area History Society



With acknowledgements to *Exploring Loose Village* by Roger Thornburgh (© Loose Amenities Association, 1978) and *Loose and Linton – a Pictorial History* (Loose Area History Society/Friends of All Saints' Church, 2004).