The name Blean, apart from being the gate into West Blean Wood, also referred to the whole area of Herne, Chislet, Reculver, East Stourmouth and Sturry, forming the Hundred of Blean (Bleangate) in the middle ages. A hundred was an administrative area used to divide a larger region into smaller geographical units. It is situated on the highest ground locally and it could have been the location of the Hundred Court Leet, which dealt with disputes and levied taxes on behalf of the king. At one time West Blean and East Blean Woods were in the parish of Chislet. Although detached from the main parish area it provided woodland, for the benefit of St Augustine’s Abbey who owned Chislet and got considerable income from the woods.

Droveways were used for many centuries to drive animals from winter to summer pasture. Two woodbanks with ditches beside them 15 to 20 metres apart kept the animals from straying into the wood and browsing on the valuable coppice re-growth. They also served as ownership boundaries and were also used by local people to bring out timber and underwood.

There are two old pollards on the edge of Cripps Wood, to the left of the stile on the boundary of the open field. Pollards are cut at or above head height, often to prevent browsing animals reaching the new shoots. However they were also used to mark significant points, perhaps parish or ownership boundaries. Look out for other veteran trees when walking in woodland.

To the left there are excellent panoramic views over Knockhmdown Hill and the escarpment that was Stubbs Wood. Vast quantities of clay were removed from here to fill the breach in the sea defences in the great storm of 1953. On a clear day you can see Sheppey and Essex beyond and the 30 turbines of the Kentish Flats Wind Farm in the Swale estuary.

Bleangate Shaw - A shaw or shave is a strip of woodland, usually between 5 and 15 metres wide. Shawls commonly form boundaries between fields or line a road and are usually composed of natural woodland and they often have diverse woodland ground vegetation similar to other natural woodlands in the area. They should not be confused with hedges, even when these are made of mature trees. Like other woodland, shaws may be managed as high forest or as coppice. In some areas, shaws may be the remnants of larger woods out of which fields were assarted or cleared many centuries ago, or they may have developed from narrower hedgerows which have become unmanaged.

The old Blean Union Workhouse, which later became Herme Hospital. Opened on 14th January 1836, the workhouse served 16 parishes, neighbouring the Blean and housed 420 inmates. Built by William Edmums it comprised a large formal quadrangle enclosed by two-storey buildings. In 1879 the workhouse was extended with the construction of a hospital for Infectious cases. It was later used for ‘difficult’ women and finally a hospital for elderly patients. It has since been converted into residential use.

There are interesting Grade II listed cottages opposite.

Across the whole of the Blean there are mature oak trees. The poor nature of the clay soil makes them slow growing but of a higher density than normal. However, in the past the ‘underwood’ coppice had the most value commercially as poles, posts, faggots, bark for tanning, firewood and so on.
This walk starts at the old Blean Union Workhouse, which later became Herne Hospital and is now a residential development.

1. Turn right out of Anemone Way and walk along Canterbury Road to the junction with Bullockstone Road. Cross Bullockstone Road and turn right into Braggs Lane. Walk to the gate across the end of the lane - 'Bleangate' (950m).

2. Cross thestile which is immediately to the left of the gate but continue straight on following the track for 140m, where you will come to a turning on the right.

In the autumn look out for dragonflies hunting along the track.

3. Take this path. Kent Wildlife Trust has widened this footpath to encourage wildlife. After about 800m, look for a marker post and turning on the right to continue on the path. In another 200m you will come to a wide track. Cross over and carry straight on through the earth banks of an old droveway. Continue onward for about another 90m towards electricity pylons.

4. Walk under the pylons and then electricity poles to the junction with another public footpath marked by a post (50m). Take care as the ground here is very uneven.

5. Turn right onto the path which follows the line of the poles. Cross the stile and continue straight across a flat open field, keeping the poles on your left (375m).

6. Cross by stile or hurdle gate and walk under the electricity lines. Bear right and walk along the ridge. Keeping the boundary fence to your right, continue all the way to the corner of the field (425m).

In summer look out for skylarks as you walk along the ridge.

7. Turn right. Head diagonally right, downhill, aiming for the narrow gap, marked by post, to the left of the pylon. Sometimes there is an electric fence either at the top or at the bottom of the slope. The ground at the bottom is extremely uneven – please take care, especially when grass is long. Pass through the gap in the trees, follow the narrow path which passes between West Blean Woods and Bleanbottom Shaw. Cross over a footbridge and into the next field (250m). (see E overleaf)

8. Walk straight on to the far corner of the field keeping the edge of West Blean Wood to your right. This path leads through a narrow strip of woodland and into the next field (500m).

9. Follow the path, which goes diagonally up the hill, across a small ditch, to the corner of Banker’s Wood (550m).

10. Continue uphill, keeping the wood to your right and following the edge to the corner (200m). Continue straight across the field, currently arable, to a footbridge next to Bleangate Bungalow (125m).

11. Cross this bridge and continue, passing through two gates, behind the bungalow, into the next field. Keep the fence on your right until another footbridge. Cross the bridge and turn right. Keep to the edge of the field until the next footbridge which will take you back into Braggs Lane (150m).

12. Turn left and retrace your steps to Anemone Way and perhaps take refreshment at the First & Last Pub (550m) or in Herne Village 800m further on.

Points of interest please see overleaf