

## Chevening Parish

The Parish of Chevening is a rectangular piece of land in West Kent on the North West edge of Sevenoaks running approximately north – south, about 7 miles long and between a mile and a mile and a half wide. The Parish runs from the top of the North Downs over the earliest settled lands in the Darent Valley, up over the wooded Greensand ridge and at its southernmost point, down into the Weald of Kent. It is an Ancient Parish and through it ran two heavily used tracks, the Pilgrims Way which ran east-west at the foot of the North Downs a little to the north of the present Chevening Church and Chevening House and the Rye road also known as the Fish Road, which ran from Rye to London for hundreds of years, with strings of Ponies carrying loads of fish on their backs coming through Bessels Green, Chipstead and Chevening and then up the steep climb over the North Downs and on into London. The Parish today is still crossed by busy important roads, the M25, the M26 the A25 and the A21; making it an excellent base for anyone whose life involves motorway travel.

The Parish comprises approximately 1,300 houses spread between the hamlets of Chevening in the north, Bessels Green in the south, with the main body of population being in the village of Chipstead in the centre of the Parish. In medieval times Chipstead was the site of a Fish Market and was clearly prosperous, with portions of medieval and Tudor Hall Houses being incorporated into present day dwellings in the High Street. In Georgian and Victorian times Chipstead was an Agricultural Community with services in the village such a Blacksmith to support this activity, many of today's residents are either commuters to London or are involved in a Service Industry somewhere in West Kent, whilst a good deal of agriculture still continues.

Chipstead is a pleasant place; with the river Darent running through it, with plenty of Green Open Spaces including a well used Recreation Ground with Cricket and Football Pitches. Chipstead Lake which is in a central position was the result of excavating for Sand and Gravel in the 1950s and 1960s and covers an area of over 60 acres and is a great visual and environmental benefit to the village. Chipstead Sailing Club has a flourishing membership and if one is not actually sailing, watching the

boats on the lake from Chipstead Green on a summer's day is a very pleasant way to spend the odd hour.

Chipstead has two Pubs, the Bricklayers Arms and the George and Dragon, a very successful C. of E. Primary School and many clubs and organisations which use the facilities provided by the Church Hall and the modern Sports Pavilion.

The Parish Council was formed in 1895 and the first precept from the whole Parish was £26, today the precept is almost £50,000. The Parish Council has nine elected Members and a Parish Clerk, it meets once a month usually on the first Monday of the Month in the new Sports Pavilion, which it owns, and members of the public are welcome to the meetings. The Parish Council is responsible for the ownership and maintenance of all the Open Spaces in the Parish, the Footway Lighting, the Churchyard and Burial Ground, and representing the views of the residents to the District Council, the County Council and Central Government when required. The Parish Council also has the opportunity to comment on all Planning Applications in the Parish.

Chevening is an oasis of calm in a busy world being only one mile from the M25, yet Chevening has remained unchanged over the centuries. It is made up of a group of early Georgian houses, a mid Victorian pub, which is now a private house and St Botolph's Church, part of which dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Directly opposite St Botolph's is Chevening House, formerly the home of the Stanhope family. Built in 1722 the house and the estate were put into a Trust on the death of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl Stanhope in 1967, and Chevening is now the Official Residence of the Foreign Secretary. The extensive gardens are open to the public several times each year. Chevening is a starting point for several Footpaths which go down the Darent valley or climb the North Downs.

Bessels Green has a triangular shaped green with houses of varying sizes and styles dating from early Georgian to Victorian on two of its sides. The Fish Road from Rye to London ran down the western side of the Green. At the corner of the Green is the Kings Head, the earliest part of which is over 300 years old. Bessels Green is a favourite spot for groups of artists who take pleasure in painting the row of cottages

on the eastern side of the Green. A little to the north of the Green itself is Bessels Green Baptist Chapel which has been on its present site since 1780. Bessels Green is also home to a Unitarian Chapel based in the Old Meeting House which was built in 1720 for the original Baptist Congregation.