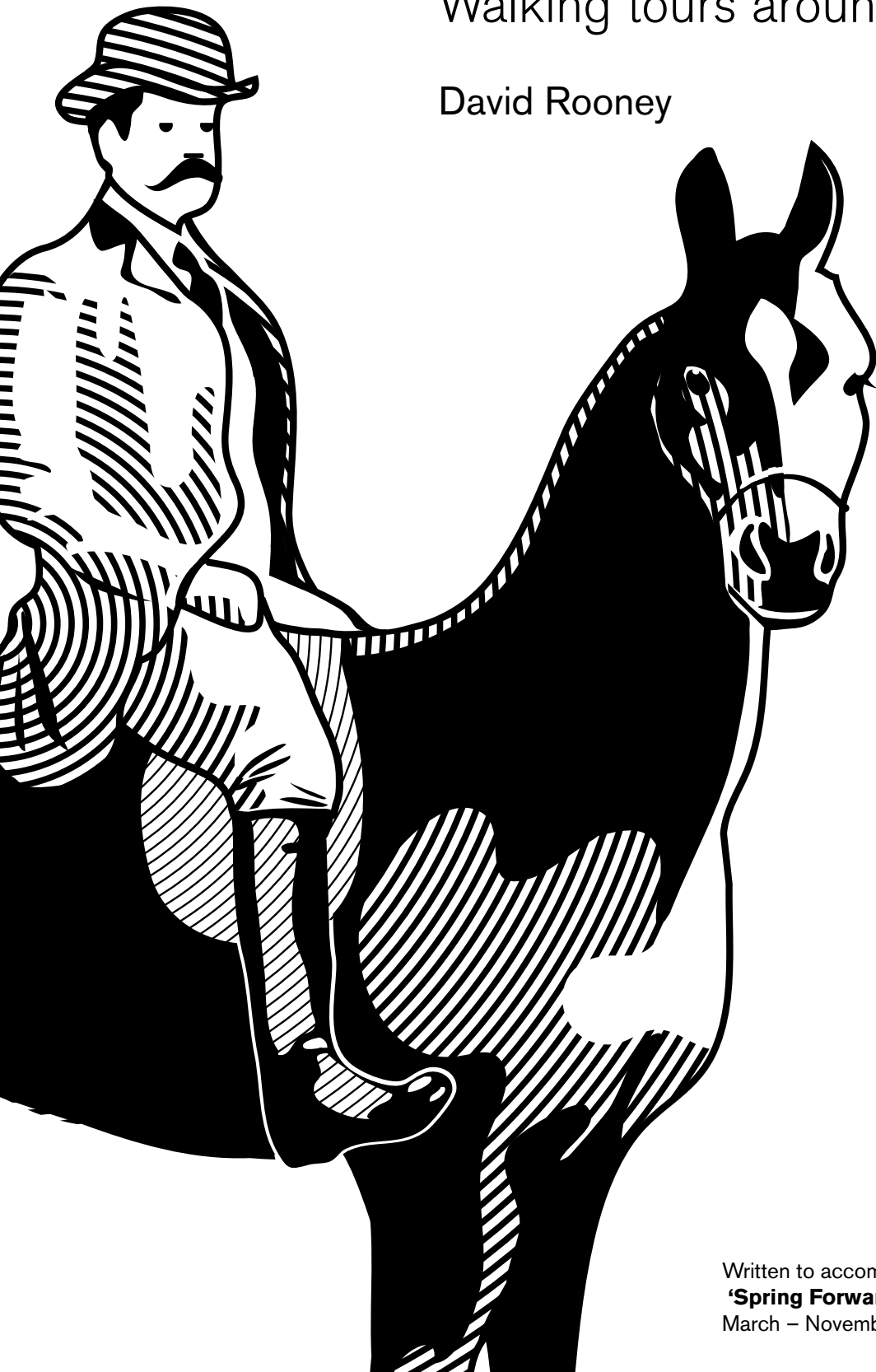


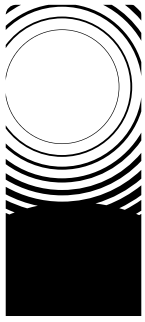
Walking the 'Willett Way'

Walking tours around Willett-land

David Rooney



Written to accompany the exhibition
'Spring Forward: 100 Years of British Summer Time'
March – November 2007



Introduction

2007 marks 100 years since the idea of British Summer Time was first seriously proposed – by William Willett (1856–1915), a house-builder and horse-rider who settled in Chislehurst, Kent. It is also the 80th anniversary of the unveiling of a William Willett memorial, set among the trees and ferns of Petts Wood, a few miles from the Royal Observatory, Greenwich.

British Summer Time – or Daylight Saving Time as it is known elsewhere – affects all of us. Yet few people know that it originated in the suburbs of south-east London, or that its creator was responsible for important housing developments across the capital and in other places.

The two walks described in this booklet reveal the hidden history of William Willett, his life and the work of his building firm. They also show what happened after his death in 1915 and how local people recognized and commemorated his achievements. For by the 1920s, William Willett had become a posthumous hero, with more and more people backing the daylight-saving plan that he never lived to see established.

Public money was raised to buy and preserve Petts Wood, partly as a living memorial to Willett but mostly as local residents wanted to prevent building development encroaching their green spaces. A sundial – keeping British Summer Time, not Greenwich Mean Time – was erected in a clearing.

Willett became a champion of daylight, so what better way is there to find out about his life than to go for a walk in the bright fresh air? Make a packed lunch, put on some stout walking boots and set off for Petts Wood. The Bromley walk takes about three or four hours; Sloane Square takes just a few minutes. These walks are just a brief introduction to Willett-land. If you like what you see, read the works in 'Further reading' at the end of this booklet and immerse yourself in Willett's world.



1 Petts Wood station and village signs



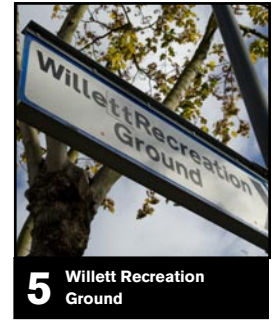
2 The Daylight Inn



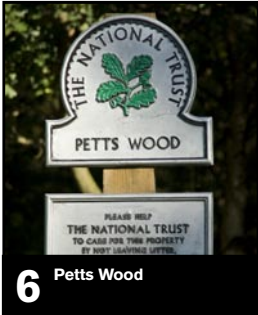
3 Willett Way



4 Willett Close



5 Willett Recreation Ground



6 Petts Wood



7 Bridle Path and Edmann Memorial



8 Willett Memorial

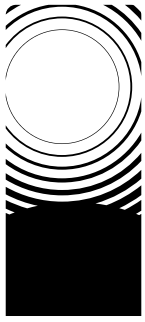


9 Chislehurst Parish Church, Willett's grave



10 Willett's house 'The Cedars'





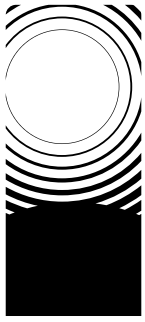
The Bromley Walk

This walk starts at Petts Wood railway station, on the Kent line out of Charing Cross, Waterloo East and London Bridge towards Orpington. Leave the station away from the ticket hall building; in other words towards the Morrison's supermarket side. Go along the station approach to Queensway and turn right. Continue along this parade of shops to Woolworth's. Outside, observe the Petts Wood West village sign, erected in 1989. A metal plaque nearby tells you that the right lower quarter of the sign represents Daylight Saving, influenced by local resident William Willett.

A little way further along, the Webster's Stationery shop sells copies of Peter Waymark's book, *A History of Petts Wood*, which contains a great deal of information about Willett. Retrace your steps back towards the station, perhaps stopping at the cafe for a cup of coffee. Return to Petts Wood Station and cross over the footbridge, leaving through the ticket hall on the other side and down the steps into Station Square.

At the foot of the steps, look left to see the Petts Wood East village sign, next to the bus stop, which is the same as the one on the other side of the railway lines. Also observe the shield reproduced in several shop windows on Station Square as the sticker of the Petts Wood Business Association.

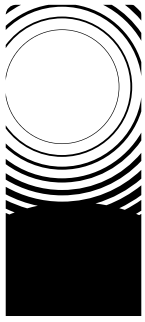




The Daylight Inn

From the foot of the station steps, go straight on with the Iceland store to your right and turn left into Fairway. Observe the mock-Tudor 'Daylight Inn' on your left. Looking closely at the hanging signs, you will see that they attempt to represent Daylight Saving Time. This pub was constructed in the 1930s by speculative builders who were developing the Petts Wood area, and named in honour of Willett's work. The original signs incorporated one clock reading 12 noon and one set an hour later. More recently, a sign was hung that has both clocks set to 12 noon, which rather misses the point.



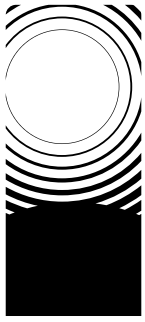


Willett Way and Willett Close

Turn right into Petts Wood Road, continue along it a short distance and then turn right into Tudor Way. Immediately turn left into Willett Way, a street named in William Willett's honour. The residential area of Petts Wood was largely conceived and laid out by the property developer Basil Scruby, with his architect Leonard Culliford. By the late-1920s, most of the roads in the area, including Willett Way, were laid out and divided into individual plots for sale to speculative builders, although Scruby retained control over the design of each house and scrutinized plans closely.

Proceed along Willett Way, observing the fine quality and very well kept mock-Tudor architecture. Turn right into Willett Close to enjoy the second Petts Wood street named after William Willett.





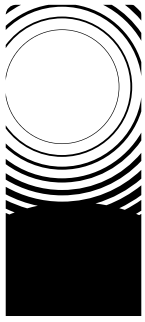
The Willett Recreation Ground

Leave Willett Close, turning left back onto Willett Way and then back to Tudor Way. Cross Petts Wood Road into Crossway and continue along it. Near the end, you will see a finger sign pointing left into the 'Willett Recreation Ground'. Follow it and see the memorial sundial set into the grass to your right, with an explanatory plaque in the wall of the cricket pavilion. The sundial is set to British Summer Time.

The Willett Recreation Ground was given this name in 1948: previously its was known as the Petts Wood Sports Ground but a council member thought there might be confusion with Petts Wood Recreation Ground (a different place), so the sports ground was renamed after Willett.

Continue through to the other side of the Ground along the curved path and leave by turning right onto Towncourt Crescent. Notice that this finger sign has a patch containing two 't's in 'Willett'. Willett's surname is still frequently misspelled as 'Willet' or 'Willetts'! Proceed along this road. Notice the blue plaque on number 49 for Heddle Nash, the opera singer, who lived there for many years until his death in 1961.





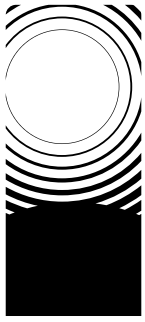
Petts Wood

At the end of Towncourt Crescent, turn left into Hazlemere Road and then right onto the public footpath to Petts Wood. Continue under the railway lines and emerge at the other side into Petts Wood itself, mostly bought by public subscription in 1927 to protect it from development and as a living monument to William Willett. A signboard nearby gives more information about the wood.

Continue straight on. Blue stripes painted on trees signify the bridle path, which is our main route through the wood and reputedly one enjoyed by Willett on the horse rides during which he came up with the idea of Daylight Saving Time. After a little while you will encounter a fork in the path. Take the left-hand fork and you will continue to see blue stripes.

To your left a bit further on, you will see a little clearing containing a stone monument to the Edlmann family. This part of the wood was not bought from the 1927 public appeal but was acquired in the same year by Colonel Francis Edlmann. He added it to his Hawkwood estate and thus also protected it from development. After Edlmann's death in 1950, the Hawkwood estate was bought by Robert and Francesca Hall and presented in 1957 as a gift to the National Trust, who already administered the rest of the Wood.





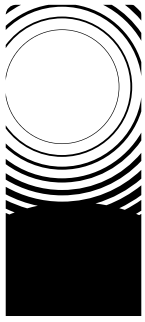
The Willett Memorial

Return to the bridle path from the Edlmann monument and continue along it to the left. On the left-hand side, you will see an open field with fenced rings of trees; continue along the path and imagine William Willett riding his horse here every morning, thinking about daylight and time.

Eventually you reach a noticeboard headed, 'Chislehurst Rotary Club'. Turn right, seeing more blue stripes, and enjoy the ferns and the distant sound of traffic and railway trains. At a small crossroads in the path, turn right into another clearing, which holds the Willett memorial.

This monument was unveiled at a packed ceremony in 1927. As you will note, it includes a sundial on its south face which is permanently set one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time – in other words, to British Summer Time. The Latin inscription means 'I only keep the summer hours'. The unveiling represented the completion of the purchase of Petts Wood by public subscription and its handover to the National Trust, who still administer it today.





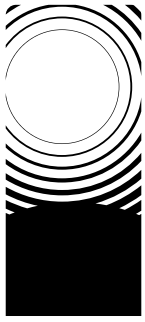
Willett's Grave

Rest a while on the bench, experiencing the tranquillity of Petts Wood and the significance of this monument to the history of timekeeping around the world. This might be a good spot to eat your lunch, if you brought any, and you could perhaps read the pages at the end of this guide about '100 Years of British Summer Time'.

Then retrace your steps. Just before you reach the Chislehurst notice board, turn right and keep going in this direction to leave the wood, observing a field of heather on the left hand side as you go. You reach a main road and turn left onto it, paying attention to the busy traffic.

Veer left into Manor Park Road (not Manor Park) and keep going. Survey the variety of well-kept housing along this picturesque road. Observe Chislehurst Parish Church of St Nicholas on your right and enter the churchyard by the lych-gate. William Willett is buried here. Once in the churchyard, turn immediately right and proceed almost to the corner you have just passed on the outside. In a badly overgrown plot, you will see the grave of William Willett and his wife.





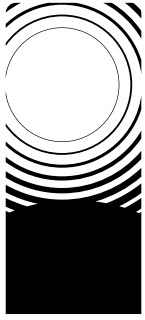
Willett's House

Leave the churchyard, turning right, and proceed along Watts Lane. You will pass the Tiger's Head on your left and may wish to stop for a restorative drink before continuing, past the width-restriction bollards in the road. You can enjoy wonderful semi-rural views to the left. Continue straight on to the busy road junction. Stand on 'hangman's corner' (marked with a small stone) and observe the large red brick house opposite. This is 'The Cedars', at the top of Camden Park Road: built by Willett, it was his home from 1894 to his death in 1915, and there is a blue commemorative plaque on it to this effect.

Besides his invention of British Summer Time, Willett's main claim to fame was as a high-quality house-builder. In the Sloane Square Walk, you will see many examples of his buildings, as well as his firm's headquarters on Sloane Square itself, still marked by a sign. Willett built estates all over London and beyond, and they are regarded as being of fine quality and very light and airy (as you might expect). He bought the Camden Park Road area in 1890 and built a street of fine large houses – including 'The Cedars' for himself.

It is from this house that, legend has it, Willett rode his horse every morning towards Petts Wood, coming up with the idea of Daylight Saving Time along the way. To the right of the house is Chislehurst Golf Club, at which Willett was a keen player. Have a scout around Willett's 'stomping ground'.





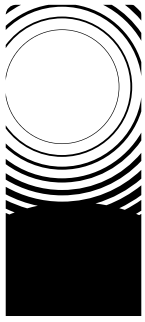
A Rural Walk

You have now seen the places of interest relating to William Willett. If you are tired and have seen enough, you could go to the nearby Chislehurst railway station and take a train one stop back to Petts Wood to finish; but you will miss out on some of the most pleasant rural surroundings in south-east London. If you have the time and energy, retrace your steps back along Watts Road and turn right into Morley Road, proceeding and then turning right again at the junction with the school ahead.

Go along this lane, with the school on your left and St Mary's Roman Catholic church to your right. At the end, veer left and proceed down Botany Bay Lane. There are footpaths along this lane onto which you can detour, or continue straight on. Enjoy the rural views so close to London. As you go further, look and listen for the distinctive Eurostar trains plying the route between London and the Continent.

On reaching farm buildings, continue ahead down the hill, along a path signed to Petts Wood. At the lowest point, you will cross the Kyd Brook and will continue up the other side. On reaching the railway lines, turn left and continue alongside the tracks to the footbridge, which you will cross. Continue on the other side, then cross the single-track line.

At the end of the footpath, you emerge into a residential cul-de-sac called Little Thrift, and into suburbia once more. Turn left, and then right into Great Thrift. Enjoy the well-kept housing on this choice estate as you proceed into Woodland Way. Eventually, you will emerge at the Petts Wood shops and will see the Daylight Inn, at which you will certainly have earned the right to stop for a drink and a bite to eat. Return to the nearby Petts Wood railway station and the end of this walk.

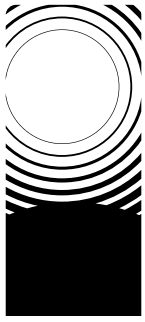


The Sloane Square Walk

William Willett, together with his father (also William, 1837–1913) were house-builders by trade, and were responsible for developing several streets of high-class houses near Sloane Square for the landowner, the Earl of Cadogan. The Willetts carried out a wholesale redevelopment of the area in the 1880s and 1890s. Their houses were renowned for being light and airy, with large windows to let in as much daylight as possible.

To see some fine examples of the Willett style, turn left out of Sloane Square underground station and proceed down Sloane Gardens. Just before you reach the end look at number 32, on your right. It is now a hotel – named the Willett Hotel, after its builders.



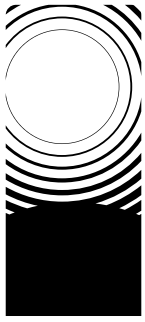


The Willett Building

Return to Sloane Square and turn left. Observe the large Portland stone building on your left. This is the Willett Building, the headquarters of the Willett building firm, designed in 1904 and built by 1911. It is, you will agree, an imposing structure. In the Edwardian baroque style, its completion was delayed by negotiations about the position of Sloane Square underground station nearby. From the centre of Sloane Square, take some time to examine the building. High up you can see hoppers for the drainage down-spouts with a characteristic embossed Willett 'W'.

Go around the corner into Lower Sloane Street, also built by Willett. Above number 7 Lower Sloane Street, now the Head Office of Hamptons, you can see the original 'Willett' sign on the stone fascia, and inside Hamptons, if you ask nicely, you may be able to see an original 1920s bronze portrait bust of William Willett, lent by Colchester Museums. Continue further down Lower Sloane Street to see the huge back gardens of the houses you saw on Sloane Gardens.





Appendix: 100 Years of British Summer Time

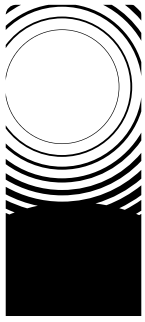
The idea of British Summer Time (BST), also known as Daylight Saving Time, was first proposed by a keen horse-rider, William Willett, who was incensed at the 'waste' of useful daylight first thing in the morning, during summer. Though the sun had been up for hours during his rides through the local woods in Chislehurst and Petts Wood, people were still asleep in bed.

In 1907 he published a pamphlet called 'The Waste of Daylight', outlining plans to encourage people out of bed earlier in summer by changing the time on the nation's clocks. He spent the rest of his life fighting to get acceptance of his time-shifting scheme. He died in 1915 with the Government still refusing to back BST. But the following year, Germany introduced the system. Britain followed in May 1916, and we have been 'changing the clocks' ever since.

By 1916, Britain and Germany were fighting each other in the First World War (1914-18), and any system that could save fuel and money was worth trying. The Summer Time Act of 1916 was quickly passed by Parliament and the first day of British Summer Time, 21 May 1916, was widely reported in the press. Clocks and watches were very different from those we use today. Many clocks could not have their hands turned backwards without breaking the mechanism. Instead, owners had to put the clock forward by 11 hours when Summer Time came to an end.

By the 1920s, William Willett was becoming a posthumous hero, as more and more people backed his daylight-saving plan. Public money was raised to buy and preserve Petts Wood. This was partly to act as a living memorial to Willett, but mostly as local residents wanted to prevent building development encroaching on their green spaces. A sundial – keeping British Summer Time, not Greenwich Mean Time – was erected there in a clearing.

Willett had become an icon of daylight. A portrait was painted; a bronze bust was sculpted; a pub was named in his memory, and in 1931 a wax figure was unveiled at Madame Tussaud's in London. But not everybody had come round to Willett's way of thinking: over the subsequent years, dissenting voices were heard.

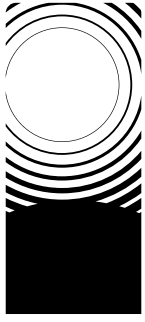


In 1968, the clocks went forward as usual in March, but in the autumn, they did not return to Greenwich Mean Time. Britain had entered a three-year experiment, confusingly called British Standard Time, and stayed one hour ahead of Greenwich until 1971. This was not the first experiment to shift the clocks in winter. In the Second World War (1939-45), Britain had adopted Double British Summer Time, with the clocks one hour ahead of Greenwich in winter and two hours ahead in summer.

When the British Standard Time experiment ended, the Home Office carried out an exhaustive review to find out whether it had been successful. The answer was both yes and no. There were 'pros and cons' to having the clocks forward and, on balance, the Government decided to return to the original British Summer Time.

Within a few years of its introduction, most countries reasonably north or south of the equator had adopted Daylight Saving Time. But it has been controversial since the day William Willett first proposed it back in 1907, following his rural rides through Petts Wood.

After a century of daylight saving, we still cannot agree on whether it is a good thing or not. When proposals to extend the system are occasionally made in Parliament, protest soon comes from those affected by its disadvantages. Daylight Saving Time tries to treat a complex network of symptoms with one solution. But not everybody sees it as a cure. So the debate continues.



References

Further reading: Peter Waymark, 'A History of Petts Wood' (Petts Wood & District Residents' Association, 2000); and David Prout, 'Willett Built' (The Victorian Society Annual, 1989)

'Spring Forward: 100 Years of British Summer Time' is a temporary exhibition at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, running from March to November 2007, complementing the Royal Observatory's permanent Time Galleries which received the 2006 Dibner Award for Excellence in Museum Exhibits.

The Royal Observatory, Greenwich, is part of the National Maritime Museum. We work to illustrate for everyone the importance of the sea, ships, time and the stars and their relationship with people.

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With special thanks to Graham Dolan and Ian and Betty Bartky for their specialist advice, support and encouragement.