

= Ditton , Kent =

Ditton is a large village and civil parish in the Tonbridge and Malling district of Kent , England . The village is 4 @. @ 6 miles (7 @. @ 4 km) WNW of Maidstone and 1 @. @ 8 miles (2 @. @ 9 km) east of West Malling . The parish , which is long and narrow , straddles the A20 (the old Dover to London road) , with farmland to the south and industry to the north . It lies in the Medway Valley , on the northern edge of the Kent Weald , and adjoins the ancient parishes of Larkfield , Aylesford and Barming .

= = History = =

The origins of the village can be traced to the stream which runs through the parish and gave rise to a number of corn mills along its length . The earliest recorded mention of the village is in the Domesday Book of 1086 . The village contains a number of listed buildings , which include a 12th @- @ century church , an old mill house and two oast houses .

More recently , ragstone and newsprint industries have developed and become important sources of local employment . The population of the village grew rapidly with the overspill of housing from the nearby town of Maidstone . Today Ditton has a mixed agricultural and industrial economy , with a wide range of social and leisure facilities . In 2001 it had a population of 4 @, @ 786 .

The name Ditton comes from the Saxon " Dictune " meaning the village situated on the dike , or trench of water . This derives from the Bradbourne Stream which rises near East Malling and passes through the village . The stream supplied the now defunct Aylesford Newsprint site , once the largest paper recycling factory in Europe , with part of its water supply .

Evidence of the early occupation of Ditton is scant . A Mesolithic tranche axe , a sharpening flake , three microliths and 36 blades were found at Ditton , but the exact site of the find is now unknown . Mesolithic flint implements , Iron Age pottery and pit dwellings have also been reported in the Holt Hill area of Ditton .

An Anglo @- @ Saxon spearhead was found in July 1962 by D. Tamkin in a cutting through a natural knoll of sand on Messrs Reed 's playing fields at Cobdown , Ditton . It is possible that the spearhead came from a grave on the top of the knoll , destroyed during the making or widening of the cutting . The first recorded mention of Ditton is in the Domesday Book , with an entry dated 1086 . At that time the village had 31 dwellings . The Domesday Book states : " Haimo the sheriff holds of the bishop (of Baieux) Dictune . It was taxed at one suling . The arable land is four carucates . In demesne there are two , and 20 villeins , with five borderers , having three carucates . There is a church and 6 servants , and one mill of 10 shillings , and eight acres of meadow , and 35 acres of pasture . Wood for the pannage of six hogs . In the time of King Edward the Confessor it was worth 8 pounds , when he received it 100 shillings , now 8 pounds . Sbern held it of King Edward . "

There was another estate (manor) in the parish at that time called Sifletone , which also belonged to the Bishop of Baieux (Bayeux) , and was entered into the Domesday Book : " Vitalis holds of the bishop (of Baieux) Sifletone . It was taxed at three yokes . The arable land is one carucate . In demesne there is one caracate and an half , and six villeins , with one borderer , having half a carucate . There are six servants , and one mill of 10s . There are ten acres of meadow , and thirty acres of pasture . In the time of the Confessor it was worth 40 shillings , when he received it four pounds , now 100 shillings . In the time of king Edward the Confessor , two men , Leuuin and Uluuin , held this land in coparcenary , and could turn themselves over with this land to whomever they would . "

Thus there were three manors within the parish ; Ditton Manor , with the appendant Brampton Manor , and Sifletone , all of which were owned by the Bishop of Bayeux at this time . The Bishop of Bayeux was Odo , Earl of Kent , half brother of William the Conqueror . In 1082 , after it was discovered that Odo planned a military expedition to Italy , he was imprisoned and his estates (including Ditton , Brampton and Sifletone) were confiscated to the Crown . Following this , Ditton Manor appears to have been held by the Clares , earls of Gloucester , by a family who assumed their surname from Ditton . Likewise , Sifletone was confiscated and went to another family who took

their surname from it .

Ditton has a ford which , along with St Peter 's Ad Vincula 's Church , is situated in a conservation area on the west of a large green . The church is dated to the 12th century with a later 14th @-@ century tower and the first bell of Ditton church was hung there in 1656 . Ditton parish register has as its opening words , " The Register book of Ditton beginning Anno Dom . 1663 . William Jole , rector , inducted Rector of Ditton , 1st August , Anno Dom . 1663 . " Also at the commencement it is recorded , on 1 August 1711 , that every acre of woodland in the parish of Ditton by immemorial custom pays tithe to the rector . In 1798 Ditton was recorded as being within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Diocese of Rochester , and deanery of Malling . This parish , among others , was obliged to contribute to the repair of the fifth pier of Rochester bridge . The church was restored in 1860 by Sir George Gilbert Scott .

The north nave window has fragments of fourteenth @-@ century glass , and the nave has a good selection of hanging wall monuments and a benefactions board . A lead plaque on the nave wall , removed from the tower roof in 1859 , has a picture of a ship from Nelson 's time scratched on it . The mill that was recorded in the Domesday Book , Church Mills , was located close to the ford and closed down around 1912 .

In 1798 the parish was described in the following terms : " The high road from London , through Wrotham , to Maidstone , crosses the middle of it , at the thirty @-@ first mile stone ; the village stands on it , and the church about a quarter of a mile further southward , on an ascent , beyond which , the parish reaches into the large tract of coppice woods , which extends as far as Teston and Barming . The stream , from Bradborne Park runs through this parish and village , across the above road , and having turned two mills , one above and the other below it , runs on to the River Medway , which is the northern boundary of this parish , near the north @-@ west extremity of which , on the road leading from Larkfield to Newith , and not far distant from that hamlet and the river , is Borough Court . This parish is rather an obscure place , and has nothing further worthy of notice in it . "

The three manors (estates) of Ditton , Brampton and Sifletone were back in common ownership in the reign of Henry VII , when they belonged to " Thomas Leigh of Sibton in Liminge " . The subsequent history of the manors is as follows :

Ditton Manor included a mansion named Ditton Court or Ditton Place that was built in the 16th century , and stood on the present site of Troutbeck House . At the beginning of King James I 's reign it was the residence of the Brewer family , many of whom lie buried in the churchyard , and remained with them until the beginning of the 18th century when , by mortgage or purchase , it came into the possession of the sheriff , Thomas Golding of Leyborne , in 1703 . He bequeathed it to his nephew , Thomas Golding of Ryarsh , who sold it to John Brewer , counsellor at law . Brewer 's niece , Mrs. Carney of West Farleigh , re @-@ conveyed it back to Thomas Golding again in about 1735 and from whom his son , John Golding , inherited it . There is reference in Organa Britannica to an organ built by renowned organ builder John Avery which was moved in the late 18th century from West Malling Parish Church to a recess in the hall of Ditton Court , described as the manor house of the area and owned by the Golding family . Ditton Place was destroyed by fire in 1987 . Today a modern apartment block , named Troutbeck House , has been built on the site of Ditton Place (as shown on an 1896 map) , and lies at the centre of a modern housing estate . One of the roads of the estate takes its name from the original house .

Brampton Manor probably stood on the site of the New Road Industrial Estate . After the manor was destroyed the site was known as Brampton Field , at least until the 18th Century , and indeed one of the streets of the housing estate which covers the site today is named Brampton Field .

Sifflington Manor (Sifletone) was an estate within Ditton parish and appears to have been incorporated into Ditton Manor at some stage before the 19th century .

A manor house , Borough Court (also known as Brooke Court) , stood in the northernmost part of the parish ; though it no longer exists it probably stood in the vicinity of the modern Aylesford Newsprint site . The Culpepper family of Aylesford owned the house during the reign of King Edward III (1327 ? 1377) . The High Sheriff of Kent in 1426 ? 27 , Walter Culpeper , was the owner until the house devolved onto his heirs , eventually passing to Richard Culpeper (later Sir Richard Culpeper

) who also owned the manor house at Oxon Hoath . Sir Richard Culpepper died in 1484 without issue and the house was divided amongst his three daughters , one of whom was Joyce Culpeper ? whose daughter was Catherine Howard and would become the fifth wife of King Henry VIII . The house was then sold to Francis Shakerly who hailed from Shakerly , Kent .

= = = Notable people = = =

William Kempe , the parson of Ditton , was sued for £ 80 in 1534 for being absent from his parish and for taking a stipend for saying prayers for the souls of the dead (which was prohibited by a statute of 1529) . Although Kempe admitted being absent , he claimed that he was chaplain to baron John Zouche and thus entitled to receive two benefices .

William Boghurst was an apocethary , and native , of Ditton , who remained in London during the Great Plague of 1665 . During the plague his medical practice expanded and he made his name . He stayed in the city throughout the epidemic , treating by his own account " 40 , 50 or 60 patients a day " . By the end of the year his reputation was sufficient to attract offers from the corporation of Norwich , which tried to employ him when the infection reached there . He wrote a book about his experience which , although not printed at the time , was subsequently published in 1894 for the Epidemiological Society of London under the title *Loimographia : an Account of the Great Plague of London in the year 1665* . In later life his fortunes appear to have declined , as he could not afford the livery of his company in 1682 . Boghurst died on 2 September 1685 aged 54 and was conveyed from London to be buried in the churchyard at Ditton .

Thomas Tilson was the rector of Ditton from 1679 ? 1702 and was in correspondence with the Protestant cleric Richard Baxter . In one letter Tilson described how a woman from Rochester had gone to her father 's house in West Malling where she died on 4 June 1691 . While on her death bed , at two o 'clock in the morning , she appeared as an apparition to a nurse in Rochester , some nine miles away , where her children were being looked after . It had been the dying woman 's wish to see her children before she died but she had been persuaded not to travel because of her ill health . Baxter included this account in his subsequent book *The Certainty of the Worlds of the Spirits* published in the same year . Tilson died in 1750 and his memorial in St. Peter 's AD Vincula Church records a bequest he made to the poor of " £ 100 in money , the yearly produce to be distributed annually on the feasts of All Saints and the Purification , in wood and wheat " (see inscription in photograph) .

Reverend Samuel Bishop (1731 ? 95) was a poet , headmaster of Merchant Taylors ' school and rector of Ditton . His posthumously published book entitled *Poems* (1796) was much admired and several times reprinted . Not everyone was complimentary about Bishop and his verses : " the character of Bishop 's countenance is not very intellectual , and there is a timid , and almost mean expression about the mouth . He looks but little qualified to insist upon the discipline necessary to be observed at Merchant Tailor 's (sic) school , or to wield the weapons of Dr. Busby . But , we suppose , he did both occasionally , besides writing his epigrams , and composing verses to his wife , ? " To Mrs. Bishop . " Of this lady he sings sometimes more like the tea @-@ kettle than the nightingale " .

Thomas Golding , sheriff of Kent in 1703 , was living in the nearby parish of Leybourne when he bought Ditton Court , around the start of the 18th century . His arms were " argent , a cross voided between four lions passant , guardant gules " (a red hollow cross between four lions lying down with their heads and front paws up , on a white or silver background) . He left Ditton Court to his nephew , another Thomas , who seems to have sold it and then bought it back again around 1735 .

The surname Golding is synonymous with a variety of hop known as Goldings and , although it is not certain who discovered the hop , it has been accredited to John Golding (who died some time before 1811) , the great nephew of Thomas and the owner of Ditton Court , or to his son John (who died at Ditton Place in 1851) .

Lt. Col. Clifford Sheldon , DSO , was joint managing and senior director of Reeds , the paper manufacturer , and was connected with that firm and its associated companies from 1911 until his death in 1950 at the age of 62 years . He gave his name to the Clifford Sheldon Club House , a

converted oast house , which subsequently became the Manor and Greenside Oast .

= = = Turnpike = = =

The current A20 , which runs through the village , was once a turnpike , probably established between 1780 and 1820 to connect London with Dover . The Turnpike Act of 1744 required that Turnpike trusts set up milestones along these roads . A series of mileposts made in cast @-@ iron appear on the stretch of road between Aylesford and Addington ; at Ditton , Larkfield and Ryarsh . The one at Larkfield is shown on an 1862 Ordnance Survey map and the Ditton post is shown on a similar map of 1869 . Both the Larkfield and Ditton posts are classed as Class II listed buildings .

= = = Population = = =

In 1663 the population was recorded as 218 . The 1831 Topographical Dictionary described Ditton as " a parish in the hundred of Larkfield , lathe of Aylesford ... containing 192 inhabitants . " In 1851 the population was 235 and by 1872 the population was 255 , with 51 houses in the parish .

= = = Education = = =

The Ditton Church School was founded in 1853 as a place of education for 70 children , and enlarged in 1887 by the Brassey family for Jubilee of Queen Victoria . A separate infant school opened in 1973 .

Ditton Infant School today caters for boys and girls from 4 to 7 years of age and shares its site with Ditton Church of England Junior School . There were 138 children on the infant school roll in 2008 , the time of its most recent Ofsted inspection .

Ditton Church of England Junior School is a primary school catering for mixed pupils aged 5 ? 11 and is adjacent to the infant school . In 2008 there were 277 children on the school roll and it was inspected by Ofsted in 2010 .

Aylesford School ? Sports College is a secondary school situated in Teapot Lane , Aylesford , in modern buildings . Its catchment area is to the western side of Maidstone , and includes pupils from Ditton . The school is for mixed gender pupils in years 7 to 11 , with a sixth form for those in years 12 and 13 . In 2004 the school gained specialist status as a Sports College , with the result that the curriculum now includes an element of sports education of every aspect . In 2010 there were 944 pupils on the school roll and it was inspected by Ofsted in the same year .

MidKent College (formerly Mid @-@ Kent College of Higher and Further Education) is the nearest further education college to Ditton . Three campuses , situated in Maidstone and Medway , cater for around 15 @,@ 000 students aged 16 + . The courses offered cover a number of vocational and academic subjects starting with pre @-@ entry level and finishing at degree level .

Ditton Heritage Centre has been established within an old Victorian building in the village to teach children in the style of a Victorian school . The classroom has been fully restored to represent a typical classroom of the Victorian era .

= = = War Memorial = = =

Each year a Remembrance Sunday parade takes place , starting in the village at 11am , to commemorate the military personnel who died in World War I (12 names) and World War II (7 names) . The parade culminates at the War Memorial , which stands on the eastern side of the junction between the A20 road and New Road . A wreath is laid on the monument by members of local groups and of the parish council .

The monument was designed by Gilbert Scott , who gifted the land the monument stands on to the village . It records the names of the military personnel who fell in the two world wars . Its design is unique among war memorials in the United Kingdom on account of the roof over the cross . The monument was dedicated and unveiled on 26 September 1920 , in a ceremony attended by the

Bishop of Rochester and General Archibald Murray . The monument was granted listed building status in 2000 as a result of Ditton Parish Council approaching the War Memorial Society for assistance to repair it .

= = = Listed buildings in Ditton = = =

= = Geography = =

This history of Ditton has , in part , been shaped by the availability of natural resources in the area , especially water , soil and rocks . Its position in relation to transport links with London , notably the main roads and railways which tend towards the capital city , has also contributed to the village 's development . Nowadays the parish is characterised by industrial units to the north , the middle by residential estates , and the south by fields and woodland .

The parish of Ditton lies in the Medway valley and borders the River Medway to the north and the Weald to the south . The Medway is Kent ? s principal river and rises near East Grinstead in Sussex , flowing eastwards to Maidstone . After passing Ditton parish it turns north and cuts through the North Downs at Rochester , joining the estuary of the River Thames as its final tributary near Sheerness . The Medway is some 112 kilometres (70 mi) long .

The availability of water to transport products and raw materials , and as a resource used in the manufacture of paper , was essential to the historical development of paper mills in the area . Bradbourne stream , which meanders through the parish in a south @-@ east to north @-@ west direction , rises in East Malling , crosses under the A20 road and M20 motorway , and joins the river Medway near the Aylesford Newsprint site . Historically the availability of running water was essential to the early settlements that grew up in Kent , and to the establishment of industries in the area ; such as providing power to drive the mills which ground grain .

Ditton is situated between the Lower Weald and the Chalk (North) Downs . The parish encompasses the Lower Greensand strata , where a formation of hard sandy limestone known as the Hythe Beds is abundant . From this formation ragstone is obtained . Kentish ragstone was a historically important building material in south east England . The Romans used ragstone in the construction of London and villas in the south @-@ east . Medieval builders used ragstone to build churches , civic buildings , houses and bridges over local rivers . The predominance of ragstone beds in the locality gave Ditton a legacy of quarrying which continues today .

= = Governance = =

= = = Chatham and Aylesford Parliamentary Constituency = = =

Ditton is within the parliamentary constituency of Chatham and Aylesford . Since 6 May 2010 the Member of Parliament has been the Conservative party 's Tracey Crouch . At the 2010 general election , the Conservatives won by a majority of 6 @,@ 069 with 46 @.@ 2 % of the vote in the constituency . Labour won 32 @.@ 3 % of the vote , Liberal Democrats 13 @.@ 3 % , the British National Party 3 @.@ 1 % and the United Kingdom Independence Party 3 @.@ 0 % .

= = = Kent County Council = = =

There are 84 elected councillors on Kent County Council of whom seven represent Tonbridge & Malling residents . The remaining 11 councils in Kent are represented by the other members . Tonbridge & Malling borough is divided into six county council divisions with each division having one councillor elected to represent it , except for the Tonbridge division which has two councillors . The county council division of Malling Rural North East includes Aylesford , Burham , Ditton and Wouldham .

= = Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council = = =

Ditton is a ward in the Tonbridge and Malling local government borough and has two of the 53 seats on the Council . On 7 May 2015 Ditton residents elected Tom Cannon & Ben Walker to represent them on Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for 4 years .

= = Ditton Parish Council = = =

Created in 1894 as a result of legislation requiring each parish to have its own council , the council presently consists of 13 members and is responsible for a variety aspects of parish life : the general upkeep and maintenance of two recreation grounds , the village green , War Memorial , Community Centre , parish allotments , and (in part) the churchyard . The council also funds floodlights to illuminate the church . A magazine , the Ditton Gazette , is published on a quarterly basis and is circulated among the households of the parish . In February 2006 , the council was awarded Quality Parish Council status .

= = Demography = =

At the 2011 UK census , the Ditton electoral ward had a population of 4 ,@ 786 . The ethnic breakdown was 96 % white , 1 @. @ 2 % mixed race , 1 @. @ 7 % Asian , 0 @. @ 6 % black and 0 @. @ 3 % other . The place of birth of residents was 94 @. @ 8 % United Kingdom , 0 @. @ 4 % Republic of Ireland , 1 % other 2001 EU member countries , 0 @. @ 5 % later EU accession countries and 3 @. @ 2 % elsewhere . Religion was recorded as 67 @. @ 5 % Christian , 0 @. @ 3 % Buddhist , 0 @. @ 3 % Hindu , 0 @. @ 1 % Sikh and 0 @. @ 6 % Muslim . 24 @. @ 2 % were recorded as having no religion , 0 @. @ 3 % had an alternative religion and 6 @. @ 7 % did not state their religion .

The economic activity of residents aged 16 ? 74 was 43 @. @ 4 % in full @-@ time employment , 15 @. @ 6 % in part @-@ time employment , 9 @. @ 2 % self @-@ employed , 2 @. @ 5 % unemployed , 2 @. @ 5 % students with jobs , 2 @. @ 7 % students without jobs , 16 @. @ 9 % retired , 3 @. @ 7 % looking after home or family , 2 @. @ 6 % permanently sick or disabled and 0 @. @ 7 % economically inactive for other reasons . The main industries for employed residents was 18 @. @ 5 % retail , 11 @. @ 9 % health and social work , 10 @. @ 4 % construction , 8 @. @ 6 % education and 7 @. @ 9 % manufacturing . Compared with national figures , the ward had a relatively high proportion of workers in construction and retail , and a relatively low proportion in hotels and restaurants . Of the ward 's residents aged 16 ? 74 , 21 % had a higher education qualification or the equivalent , compared with 27 @. @ 4 % nationwide .

= = Economy = =

The parish of Ditton contains a number of agricultural , small commercial and industrial businesses , marking a historical shift from a farming @-@ based community to a modern , mixed economy .

The Medway valley has long been associated with the newsprint industry , but in February 2015 it was confirmed that the last major paper mill in the parish , Aylesford Newsprint , was to close with the loss of 233 jobs . Ditton 's connection with the industry goes back to 1922 when the first factory was built by Reed International on the banks of the river Medway . Reed International were a major paper manufacturer which , at its height , had in the region of 1 @, @ 500 employees . The business was seriously hampered by the advent of World War II , which caused a shortage of pulp to make newspapers and led to a different material , waste paper , being used in its place . Waste paper was then replaced by recycled fibre , which was fully utilised in the process of producing newsprint . The 60 @-@ acre Newsprint plant belonged to SCA , paper manufacturers from Sweden , in partnership with Mondi , and £ 250 million was invested in developing the site . Aylesford Newsprint was one of the world 's leading manufacturers of newsprint , recycling around 500 @, @ 000 tonnes of material

to produce some 400 @, @ 000 tonnes of final product . Media organisations in Europe , America and the Far East relied on the recycled newsprint from the plant for their publications . Ditton stream was a vital water supply for the processes carried out in the plant .

At the opposite end of the parish is part of the 580 acre East Malling Research Station . This began in 1913 with 23 acres in response to a need among Kent farmers for assistance with their fruit growing activities . Since fruit was an important part of the Kent economy , the station performed a valuable role in carrying out research experiments and advising farmers on fruit production . The land that forms the research station grounds is conducive to the growing of fruit , with good water retention and drainage properties . The station was also well placed in terms of transport links , since the nearby railway connected with London in one direction and the agricultural college at Wye in the other . It was an indication of the importance of the research station that the government and fruit producers were prepared to give financial support for its work . In 1938 the 360 acre Bradbourne House estate was added to the site . As a result of research work carried out on the site , the station established a reputation as a world centre for the research of perennial crops . Horticultural Research International operated the site until 2009 until 1 April 2010 , since when the research station has been owned by the East Malling Trust . The station is fully engaged with local business and contains a lecture hall that can take 200 delegates .

The Ditton Laboratory , a short distance from the research station , was opened in 1930 by the Empire Marketing Board as a part of Cambridge University 's Low Temperature Research Station . The purpose of the laboratory was to carry out experiments on the shipping of fruit across the high seas , in order to extend its life over long , seaborne journeys . This led to an experiment being carried out to simulate , as far as was possible , conditions on board a cargo ship , the so @-@ called " ship on land " experiment . One focus of research was the Cox 's Orange Pippin Apple , which had the reputation of being a difficult fruit to transport over long distances . In 1969 the laboratory was incorporated into the East Malling Research Station as the fruit storage section . Today the building is boarded up and appears to be deserted , although a fish farm and fruit distribution business continue at its rear .

Quarrying for ragstone is still an important local industry . Gallagher Aggregates Limited operate the Hermitage Quarry , which is situated 1 @.@ 5 kilometres (0 @.@ 93 mi) to the south of Ditton village . About 50 employees work in the quarry and another 60 on subsidiary functions . According to the firm 's estimates there is only enough ragstone left in the quarry for another four years ' quarrying , with the result that new sources of production are being sought . Ragstone is an important material the construction industry for roads and buildings .

In 2011 Gallagher Aggregates applied to extend the Hermitage Quarry into Oaken Wood in the parish of Ditton . The planning committee of Kent County Council granted permission for quarrying in part of the woodland , but the decision was referred to the Secretary of State . Planning committee chairman Richard King said that " local residents and environmental groups have argued that the loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland and impact on the local wildlife site is unacceptable . On balance , however , members felt the job prospects and the economic need for ragstone to support construction in the county in future , and benefits of the project , outweighed these objections . " The application was subsequently approved on appeal by the communities secretary , Eric Pickles , who observed that the economic benefits of being able to produce more ragstone and crushed rock from the site outweighed the loss of the wood .

Ditton is five miles from the centre of the county town of Maidstone , which is an important source of employment in the area .

= = Travel links = =

A number of bus services pass through Ditton . There are 2 main frequent and reliable routes provided by Arriva Southern Counties .

The 71 Arriva service between Snodland and Maidstone Town Centre (Via Allington) passes through Ditton every 10 minutes (Monday - Saturday) and every 30 minutes (Sunday) . The sister 72 Arriva service between Kings Hill and Maidstone Town Centre also passes through Ditton every

30 minutes (Monday - Saturday) .

The 703 Arriva service between Maidstone Town Centre and Bluewater Shopping Centre in Greenhithe , Dartford also passes through Ditton however this is an intermittent service that runs three times a day (Monday - Friday) .

Aylesford railway station , with connecting trains to London St Pancras , is within walking distance of Ditton . East Malling railway station , 1 @. @ 5 miles (2 @. @ 4 km) from the village , is on the main London ? Maidstone and London ? Ashford line with trains leaving London Victoria and Maidstone at hourly intervals . The journey to London takes approximately one hour .

Maidstone West railway station is 4 miles (6 @. @ 4 km) from Ditton . On 23 May 2011 a new high speed " Javelin " service began from the station to St Pancras International via Strood , though on a trial basis . The service consists of three departures from Maidstone West in the morning , and three departures from St Pancras International in the late afternoon though the early evening . The service calls at Strood , Gravesend , Stratford International and St Pancras International , with journey times of forty @- @ seven minutes . There is also one service in the morning departing St Pancras International for Maidstone West . In the evening there is one service departing from Maidstone West for St Pancras International . Passengers can still travel twice an hour from Maidstone West to St Pancras International in sixty @- @ five minutes by changing at Strood (an option also open to passengers boarding at Aylesford) .

The M20 motorway is easily accessible from Ditton via junctions 4 and 5 .

As Ditton is situated in Kent it has excellent connections to mainland Europe and farther afield through Kent 's major transport nodes : seven freight and passenger ports , including the Port of Dover ; two international high @- @ speed railway stations , Ashford and Ebbsfleet ; London City Airport (approximately 35 miles (56 km) away) and London Gatwick (40 miles (64 km) away) . The railway stations at Ashford (25 miles (40 km) away) and Ebbsfleet (20 miles (32 km) away) have connections to Paris and Brussels .

Ditton has extensive transport links , being close to the M20 motorway and the national railway network with its regular connections to London . The Channel Tunnel is within easy driving distance and the village is twinned with Rang @- @ du @- @ Fliers in the Pas @- @ de @- @ Calais department of the Nord @- @ Pas @- @ de @- @ Calais region of France .

= = Ditton Nature Reserve = =

Since 31 May 2009 Ditton has had an officially recognised nature reserve , Ditton Quarry off Kilnbarn Road . Natural England declared it a Local Nature Reserve after a partnership had been formed between Ditton Parish Council , local residents , and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council .

Many ragstone quarries have been abandoned and backfilled once exhausted . When Ditton Quarry closed down in 1984 , quarrying operations had left behind a legacy of a lime @- @ rich soil which formed the foundation of a thriving habitat for plants and wildlife ; 140 wild flowers (including five that are rare in Kent) , 18 butterfly species , and 50 bird species have been recorded . It is also home to foxes , rabbits , frogs , toads and newts . The quarry is now a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) . Public access is free .

The quarry is also a prime location for geological research and provides opportunities for field studies in a variety of disciplines : sedimentology , stratigraphy , palaeontology , geography , and industrial archaeology . Several features make this a unique location for the study of rock formations . Visitors can examine the extensively exposed rock faces , primarily Kentish Ragstone and Hassock facies , and study changes in vertical and lateral facies . The facies are glauconitic with some horizons of silicification . Shell debris (ammonites , belemnites , nautiloids , bivalves , etc .) and bioturbation are also present . The quarry could be important for future research via gamma ray profiling of the rock beds in relation to changes in sea level and climate .

= = Social and leisure activities = =

== Open spaces ==

Ditton has various urban open spaces : the New Road 4 @-@ acre (16 @,@ 000 m2) recreation ground was acquired in 1954 and a second one measuring 11 acres (45 @,@ 000 m2) was provided in the early 1970s , just prior to the building of the community centre (see Ditton Community Centre) . A further 18 acres (73 @,@ 000 m2) of recreational land was handed to the parish in 1991 following the cessation of quarrying at Ditton Court Quarry (see Ditton Nature Reserve) . A small section of the land has been leased to Ditton Bowls Club who , with Sports Council grants and loans from the parish council , have provided a thriving member 's club with a well kept green , looked after by parish council staff . The club has recently added a pavilion for use by its members .

== Ditton Parish ==

== Ditton Community Centre ==

In 1973 Ian Lavender (Pte . Pike of " Dads ' Army ") opened the centre , which was subsequently extended . Providing an important focal point for the local community , the centre has a hall capacity of up to 400 people . Other rooms include a meetings room and a functions room (up to 100 people) . Activities throughout the week include : a playgroup & toddler club , keep fit class , badminton , table tennis and indoor bowls on weekdays ; discos , dances , roller skating , indoor tennis and craft markets at the weekend . The centre also provides for sporting activities in its grounds : two tennis courts , two football pitches and a cricket pitch . There are showers and changing rooms inside the building . The centre is owned by Ditton Parish Council which holds regular meetings there .

== Cobdown Sports and Social Club ==

Set in the grounds of Cobdown Park , the Cobdown Sports and Social Club evolved from the former social club for Reeds International , the paper @-@ maker . A new clubhouse was built in 1985 for Reed International Sports and Social Club and in 1989 the club became the Cobdown Sports & Social Club when it was taken over by the club members . Although it remained a members club , with many of the same activities , the club was opened up to the general public and new activities were added . Sports form an important part of these activities , and the club is an important local centre with a wide range of facilities to cater for groups and organisations , such as schools and businesses . Membership is also open to sports teams that wish to use the club . Facilities include a bar , with snooker and pool tables , a darts board , and a big screen for major sporting events . There is a dedicated function room that is used for social and business events and can accommodate a maximum of 100 people seated .

== Kentish Quarryman ==

In 2008 the Kentish Quarryman Public House , which was the former Ditton Working Men 's Club located on the western side of New Road , was opened . The house took its name from the historic connection of the parish with ragstone quarrying , which is acknowledged by a large slab of ragstone at its front entrance (see photograph) .

== World Custard Pie Throwing Championship ==

In the 1980s , Ditton was home to the World Custard Pie Throwing Championship , after Councillor Mike Fitzgerald , who founded the championships , moved to Ditton from Coxheath , bringing the championships with him . Although the competition died out in 1988 , it was revived at Coxheath in

2007 , and it has been held there annually since then .