

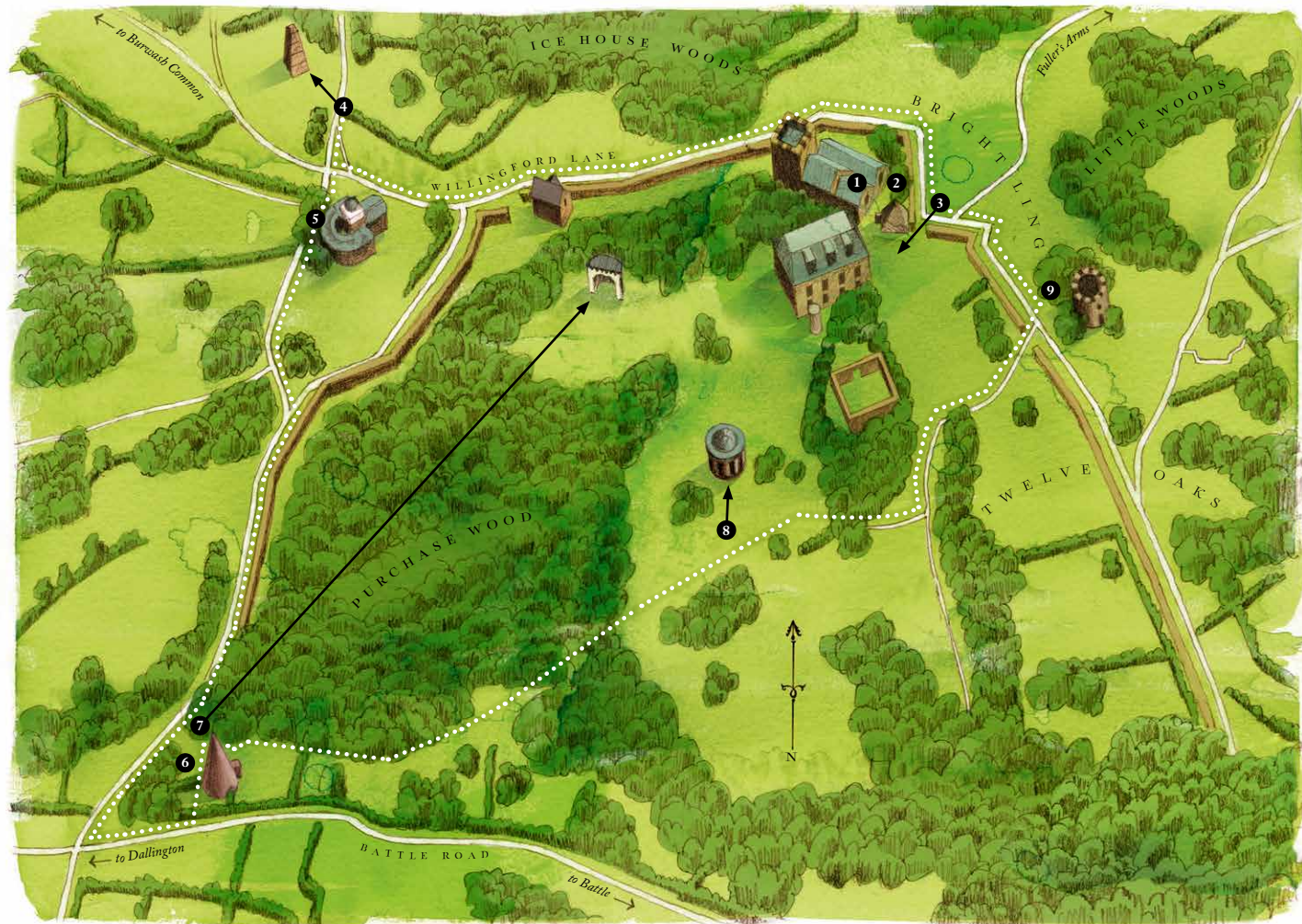
The Mad Jack Walking Tour

Why is there a large stone pyramid in the churchyard of a quiet English village? What is that strange conical structure you glimpse as you drive along the Battle Road? Follow this 5½-mile (8.5km) self-guided walk through the beautiful Sussex countryside to explore these and other oddities built by the enigmatic John ‘Mad Jack’ Fuller (1757–1834) of Brightonling.

- ❶ St Thomas à Becket Church,
- ❷ Pyramid Mausoleum
- ❸ Rose Hill*
- ❹ Brightonling Needle*
- ❺ Brightonling Observatory*
- ❻ Sugar Loaf
- ❼ Summer House*
- ❽ Rotunda Temple*
- ❾ Hermit’s Tower

See the following page for a commentary and National Grid References.

* Please observe the laws governing private property and public rights of way, which prevent visitors from approaching these sites. They can be seen from the marked points on this tour – but note that at certain times of year, views may be affected by seasonal changes in vegetation.



1 St Thomas à Becket Church

The Street, Brightling

📍 TQ 68354 21004

We begin our tour inside Fuller's local church, where his presence can still be keenly felt. You can see his family coat of arms in the stained glass behind the squire's pew, and his bust by Francis Leggatt Chantrey, with a memorial by Nollekens, looking down over the congregation. Evidence of the squire's generosity is everywhere: in the barrel organ he installed, the memorials he commissioned to Dr Primrose Blair and William Shield, and the peal of eight bells that Mad Jack had cast to commemorate Wellington's battle victories, hanging in the church tower. The nine bassoons he is alleged to have donated to the church choir have long since disappeared.

2 Pyramid Mausoleum

St Thomas à Becket churchyard

📍 TQ 68377 20980

Outside in the churchyard stands Mad Jack's 25-foot (7.6m) pyramid mausoleum. Built in 1811, twenty-three years before he died, it seems out of place amongst the weathered tombstones. Legend has it Mad Jack was buried seated at a table set with a roast chicken and a bottle of wine. Inside the tomb, a verse from Gray's *Elegy* is inscribed in the stone.

▶ Turn right as you leave Brightling churchyard, then pause to look through the stone gate immediately on the right.

3 Rose Hill

Brightling Park, The Street, Brightling

📍 TQ 68337 20927

Here you can catch a glimpse of the Fuller's family's country seat. Mad Jack inherited the estate – then known as Rose Hill – in 1777, when he was just twenty, from his uncle Rose Fuller. Mad Jack commissioned J. M. W. Turner to paint various views of the house and surrounding area.

▶ Turn left, passing the church, and walk west along Willingford Lane, keeping the wall of Fuller's estate on your left. At the top of the hill, turn right, following the signpost towards Burwash. Shortly, in a field to your left, Brightling Needle will become visible. (About 1 mile/1.6km.)

4 Brightling Needle

Brightling

📍 TQ 67007 21209

This 65-foot (20m) obelisk is constructed of coursed stone, built in four sections with stringcourses between. In the absence of any plaque or inscription, the date and purpose of the needle is open to speculation.

▶ Do an about-turn to head south along the Burwash road, retracing your steps. Cross Willingford Lane this time and continue south. Mad Jack's observatory, now a private home, will come into view on your left. (About ½ mile/0.5km.)

5 Brightling Observatory

Observatory Road, Brightling

📍 TQ 67069 20748

The Observatory was designed by Sir Robert Smirke (best known as the architect of the British Museum) and completed about 1818. Mad Jack allegedly purchased and installed state-of-the-art astronomical equipment here. Legend has it he invited guests to stargaze with him after dinner. The original dome was replaced with the current one in 1964.

▶ Continue south on the Burwash road to the Swan Inn, an ideal place to stop for refreshment. (About 1¼ miles/2km.)

▶ From the Swan Inn, go east along Battle Road. Walk past a cluster of houses and Mad Jack's Sugar Loaf folly will come into view, set back from the road on your left. Follow the signs indicating the footpath. (About ¼ mile/0.3km.)

6 Sugar Loaf

Battle Road, Dallington

📍 TQ 66921 19550

Legend has it that Mad Jack bet that he could see the spire of Dallington church from his house. On finding that this wasn't the case, he had this cone-shaped 35-foot (10.7m) folly hastily built to win the bet. Although difficult to believe, it was occupied as a cottage for many years. From the northern side of the Sugar Loaf, you can look northeast across Brightling Park and see the Summer House.

7 Summer House

Brightling Park, The Street, Brightling

📍 TQ 67741 20760

Also known as the Alcove, this brick summer house has an ornate Coade stone facade and commands excellent views to the south across Brightling Park. Built in 1803, it is thought to have been Mad Jack's first foray into folly building.

▶ Walk north along the footpath, through the field and into the woods. Turn right onto the first lane and continue east. To your left you will be able to catch sight of the Rotunda Temple. Take the left turn at the T-junction and walk north to Ox Lodge Farm. (About 2¼ miles/3.5km.)

8 Rotunda Temple

Brightling Park, The Street, Brightling

📍 TQ 68032 20326

This domed temple folly is about 25 feet (7.6m) tall and was built around 1810. A ring of Tuscan columns surrounds a circular room. Legend has it that Mad Jack entertained guests with card parties and debauched evenings here.

▶ Carefully cross the Brightling road at Ox Lodge Farm and turn right to briefly divert south. A footpath through a copse of trees will take you to the Hermit's Tower. (About 200 yards/180m.)

9 Hermit's Tower,

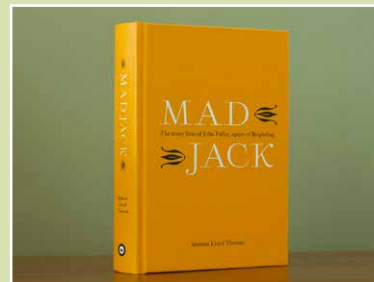
Brightling

📍 TQ 68850 20668

This 35 feet (10.6m) high circular stone tower is now obscured by trees. The original wooden staircase and platform were lost in a fire and replaced by the iron structure you see now. There have been many guesses as to why Mad Jack built this tower here but none has, as yet, been substantiated.

▶ From the Tower, head north along the Brightling road to return to Brightling church. (About 0.4 mile/0.6 km.)

📖 Buy the book 📖



Mad Jack may be best remembered for the follies that dot the landscape of his Brightling estate, but there is far more to his story. During his life he served as a soldier and a Member of Parliament, and was a generous philanthropist and patron of the arts and sciences. Read more about his fascinating life and legacy in *Mad Jack: the many lives of John Fuller, squire of Brightling*. To purchase a copy with a special £5 discount, go to www.ypdbooks.com and enter code 'MADJACKS' at the checkout.