Combe Gibbet

At the top of Ham Hill where it joins the Mid Wilts Way, there is an opportunity for a two-mile detour to the west (four miles there and back) to Combe Gibbet before proceeding eastwards. This stretch of the ridgeway provides a series of superb panoramic views to the north.

After nearly a mile Ham Spray House, a former retreat of the Bloomsbury Group **(see Village of Ham)**, can be seen in the valley below at GR 343631. A quarter of a mile beyond Combe Gibbet is Walbury Hill, the site of a Celtic fort, which at 297m is the highest point on the North Downs.

The gibbet, which is erected on a long barrow on what is known locally as Inkpen Beacon, has a ghoulish history. It records the murder in 1676 of Martha Bromham and her son Robert by her husband George Bromham, a farm labourer from Combe, and his lover Dorothy Newman, a poor widow from Inkpen. One story has the pair waylaying Martha Bromham and her son and beating them to death with staves, which was witnessed by "Mad Thomas" who reported them to the authorities. Another version, which seems far-fetched, has George Bromham killing his wife by thrusting her head into a hornet's nest. Whatever actually happened, the pair were tried at Winchester where they were hanged on 3 March 1676. Their bodies were then brought back to Inkpen to be hanged in chains on the hastily erected double gibbet as a dreadful warning to the local community. The event attracted large crowds. The original gibbet has been replaced several times due to rotting, weather and vandalism. The current replica was erected in 1992.

A silent black-and-white film of the murder, called the Black Legend, was made in 1948 by the future film director John Schlesinger at the age of 22 while still at university. A fellow undergraduate, the actor Robert Hardy, starred in the film as Mad Thomas, wearing a long blonde wig and no shoes. Other roles were filled by local Inkpen villagers.

When weather conditions are favourable, Combe Gibbet becomes a favourite launch site for hang-glider enthusiasts.