



# Meopham Circular (or to Rochester) walk

Ancient woodland, landscaped parkland and a nature reserve on the Kent Downs, with an alternative ending to a riverside town full of historical interest.



<b>Length</b>	<p><b>Main Walk:</b> 19½ km<sup>†‡</sup> (12.1 miles). Four hours 35 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.</p> <p><b>Short Circular Walk, from Sole Street:</b> 16 km<sup>‡</sup> (10.0 miles). Three hours 45 minutes walking time.</p> <p><b>Alternative Walk, finishing in Rochester:</b> 19¾ km<sup>†</sup> (12.2 miles). Four hours 30 minutes walking time.</p> <p>† Subtract 1¼ km (0.8 miles; 15 minutes) if starting from Sole Street, or 2¼ km (1.4 miles; 30 minutes) if finishing the Main Walk there.</p> <p>‡ Add 2 or 4 km (1.2 or 2.4 miles; 30 minutes or one hour) if taking one of the optional extensions in Ranscombe Farm. See Walk Options &amp; Transport below.</p>
<b>OS Map</b>	<p>Explorer 148. Meopham, map reference TQ641679, is in Kent, 6 km <b>S</b> of Gravesend.</p>
<b>Toughness</b>	<p>4 out of 10 (3 for the Short Circular and Alternative Walks).</p>
<b>Features</b>	<p>This walk explores a variety of landscapes in the chalk grassland of the <b>Kent Downs</b>, with an early stretch through redundant farmland being transformed into <b>Jeskyns Community Woodland</b>. After a circuit around a fine collection of veteran trees in <b>Ashenbank Wood</b> the walk comes to the attractive village of <b>Cobham</b>, with a choice of three lunch pubs along its single street. This small village has a surprisingly large parish church containing a magnificent tomb as well as a noteworthy collection of</p>

medieval brasses which were fortunate to survive the religious upheavals of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C.

After lunch the walk goes through the landscaped parkland of **Cobham Park** with its restored neo-classical monument, the **Darnley Mausoleum**. It then enters **Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve**, which claims to be one of Britain's most important sites for wildflowers. You can choose from three possible routes through its woods, fields and meadows before turning back through the **Plotlands** (community woodland) towards Meopham. The return route also includes stretches alongside a large new **vineyard** and through a small country park, **Camer Park**.

### Walk Options

**Meopham** (pronounced *Mepem*) was chosen as the starting station for this walk because it has a better train service than its more rural neighbour **Sole Street**; it also minimises overlap with other SWC walks to and from the latter station. However, the lack of any useful footpaths near Meopham station means that both the start and finish include uninspiring stretches along a busy main road. Alternative directions have therefore been provided for shorter routes starting from and finishing at Sole Street.

In order to help late starters catch up with an earlier group the directions include a few **morning short cuts** in Jeskyns and Ashenbank Wood. Conversely, there are two possible **optional extensions** in Ranscombe Farm Reserve, adding 2 km or 4 km.

For a completely different experience the **Alternative Walk** carries on through the nature reserve and follows the **Medway Valley Walk** into the historical town of **Rochester**, which is trying to restore the 'city' status it carelessly lost in one of the many local government upheavals. This is a distinctly less rural ending since in order to get across the wide **River Medway** you have to walk alongside the M2 motorway for 1¼ km, although the far-reaching view from the **Medway Viaduct** (35m above the river) does offer some compensation.

Rochester is noted for its association with **Charles Dickens**, who lived nearby at Gads Hill Place and used locations in and around the town in some of his novels. A self-guided walking tour (leaflet with map) is available from the Visitor Information Centre if you want to take in these sites, but the route here simply goes past the imposing **Castle** and **Cathedral** on its way to the High Street (where you will be hard-pressed to find an establishment without a Dickensian reference in its name) before heading to the station.

### Additional Notes

The original version of this walk was from Cuxton to Halling, two stations on the Medway Valley line. An extension through Holborough Marshes nature reserve to Snodland had already been scuppered when the new river crossing to Peter's Village blocked off a permissive path on the route, and much of the remaining walk overlapped parts of the Cuxton to Sole Street walk (#35) and the Sole Street Circular walk (2-17a). Only the attractive central section between Cobham and Ranscombe Farm has been retained, and even that is in the reverse direction. The Rochester ending was initially designated as the main walk, but in practice the circular

options have proved more popular and so these were switched around in 2023.

**Transport** Meopham and Sole Street are adjacent stations on the Chatham main line, served by trains from Victoria. An hourly stopping service via Denmark Hill calls at both stations (taking 46-49 minutes), but Meopham also benefits from an hourly semi-fast service (Mon-Sat) taking 33 minutes. At the end of the Alternative Walk there are up to five trains per hour back from Rochester as this station is served by High Speed and Thameslink trains via Strood and Gravesend as well as the Victoria trains.

For the Main Walks a **return to Sole Street** is more flexible as it would allow you to start or finish there as well as Meopham. For the Alternative Walk you would need to buy a **return to Rochester**; you can then buy a 'High Speed Upgrade' at Rochester station if you decide to travel back on this route.

If you want to abandon the walk at lunchtime there is an infrequent bus service to Sole Street (Mon-Sat), but the station is only 2½ km away if you follow the directions for Walk #35 and even less by a direct route.

Halfway through the afternoon of the Alternative Walk there are daily bus services to Rochester on both sides of the River Medway: one from outside Ranscombe Farm and the other along Wouldham Road. You could also use the map to divert to Cuxton station on the Medway Valley line for a train to Strood.

If driving, the station car parks at Meopham and Sole Street both cost around £6 Mon-Fri, £4 Sat, £3.50 Sun & BH (2024). Street parking near both stations is possible at weekends, but the areas are covered by Controlled Parking Zones on weekdays.

**Suggested Train** Take the train nearest to **09:40** from **Victoria** to **Meopham** (or **Sole Street** for the shorter start).




**Lunch** There is a choice of three pubs along the main street through **Cobham**, after around 8¼ km from Meopham or 7 km from Sole Street. In the order in which you pass them they are the Dickensian **Leather Bottle** (01474-814327), the **Darnley Arms** (01474-814218) and the **Ship Inn** (01474-814326).

**Tea** At the point where the two **Main Walk** endings split in **Henley Street** there is a village pub, the **Cock Inn** (07508-716160; open from 4pm weekdays, 2pm weekends). On the **Meopham** ending the **Camer Park café** is nominally open daily to 4pm "weather permitting", so might have closed by the time you pass through. The alternatives are a couple of 'railway pubs' which are normally open all day: the traditional **Railway Tavern** (01474-813223) near **Meopham** station and (on the shorter ending) the **Railway Inn** (01474-814375) at **Sole Street**.

At the end of the **Alternative Walk** there are many possible refreshment places in and around **Rochester's** High Street. None have been tried, but two highly-rated cafés which are normally open to 6pm daily are the **Rochester Coffee Co.** (01634-845162) at #89 and **Tiny Tim's Tea**

**Rooms** (01634-939031) at 5 Northgate. There is also a **BeeZoo** coffee shop in the station building.

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## Walk Directions



## Walk Maps



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## Walk Options ( Main | Alt. )

### M. Main Walk (19½ km)

- i. Main Walk, starting from Sole Street (18¼ km)
- ii. Main Walk, finishing at Sole Street (17¼ km)
- a. Short Circular Walk, from Sole Street (16 km)
- b. Alternative Walk, finishing in Rochester (19¾ km)
- bi. Alternative Walk, starting from Sole Street (18½ km)

## Walk Directions

*If you are doing the shorter start (from Sole Street), start at §B.*

## A. Meopham Station to Cranbourne Equestrian (2½ km)

1. Arriving from London, cross the footbridge to leave by the other platform. Go across the station forecourt and out to the A227 (Wrotham Road). **Turn sharp right** and follow the main road over the railway bridge and away from **Meopham**<sup>1</sup>. In 500m, just after the road bends left, **turn right** at a crossroads into Nurstead Church Lane.
2. Go along the lane for 250m, passing a converted oast house. Opposite the entrance to **St Mildred's** church<sup>2</sup> **turn left** onto a signposted footpath, a narrow path between the driveway to **Nurstead Court**<sup>3</sup> and Nurstead Lodge. At the end keep ahead on a broad grassy strip, with paddocks on the right and later a brief glimpse of the manor house and its grounds on the left.
3. At the end of the paddocks **turn right** onto a signposted bridleway in a belt of trees, briefly joining the **Wealdway**<sup>4</sup> (WW). In 150m **fork left** off the WW at a waymarker post onto a short path through the trees. Go through a metal gate into a large field and turn right to go along its edge.
  - If deterred by a warning notice about horses in the field you could remain on the WW for a further 250m; where it zig-zags left and right a short linking footpath would let you rejoin the suggested route.
4. On the main route go up to the right-hand field corner and leave through a metal side gate (with the link path joining from the right). Keep ahead through some trees and continue on a grassy path across a meadow, climbing gently towards the middle of a copse on the horizon. Follow a path through the trees and keep ahead across a field to a lane (Copt Hall Road). Cross the lane and go over a stile onto the continuation of the footpath.
5. At the end of a short grassy strip between fences go over another stile and **turn half-left** to go diagonally across several paddocks via gaps in the wooden fences. After the last paddock the right of way goes straight ahead to cut across the corner of a large field towards a metal fieldgate, but it is easier to turn left onto a grassy track and turn right at a T-junction to come to the same point. At a path junction by the gate **turn left** onto a broad cinder track through an equestrian centre.

*Continue the directions at §C.*

## B. Sole Street Station to Cranbourne Equestrian (1¼ km)

6. Arriving from London, cross the footbridge to leave by the other platform. Go up the station access road and turn left onto the road at the top, joining the **Wealdway**<sup>4</sup> (WW). After crossing back over the railway **turn left** again into Manor Road. Go all the way along this residential street, which swings right at the end and becomes Sallows Shaw.
7. At this bend **turn left** onto a signposted footpath, then in 25m **turn right** at a waymarked path junction, staying on the WW. Follow the path alongside garden fences to White Post Lane. Turn right briefly onto the lane to go back towards Sole Street, but before reaching the first house **turn left** onto a driveway. Where this forks, take the right-hand footpath (leaving the WW).
8. Follow the path through a copse and then along the right-hand edge of a field, with paddocks on the right. 50m before reaching the field corner you come to a fieldgate on the right, with footpath waymarkers. **Turn right** past the gate onto a broad cinder track through an equestrian centre.

## C. Cranbourne Equestrian to Ashenbank Wood (3 km)

*The OS map implies that the right of way curves through the paddocks to the right of the main track, but the staff have said that they prefer walkers to stay on the track.*

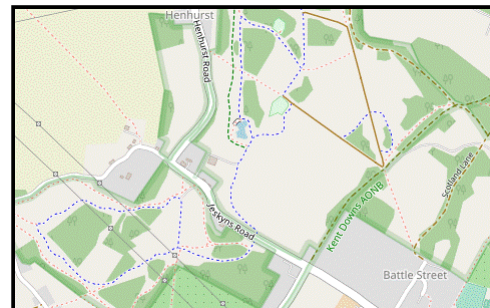


9. Unless otherwise directed stay on the main track through the equestrian centre, with paddocks on both sides. At the far end go out past a wooden fieldgate and turn right briefly onto a lane (Round Street). In 25m **turn left** onto the continuation of the footpath, a narrow enclosed path. After going through a wooden kissing gate ignore a waymarker arrow pointing to the right and **keep ahead** on a grassy path alongside a hedge, entering **Jeskyns Community Woodland**<sup>5</sup>.

*There is a comprehensive network of all-weather paths through this large country park and the suggested route is almost entirely along them, while avoiding the busiest area around the car park and café in the north-western corner (Jeskyns Woods). On crowded days you might prefer to devise your own route on the secondary network of horse rides (waymarked with a horseshoe on a pink square) and other grassy paths.*

10. For the suggested route go straight across a horse ride and **bear right** onto the all-weather path a little way ahead, joining a loop around **Jeskyns Orchards**.

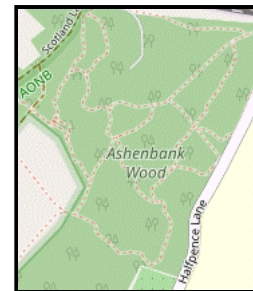
- You could instead turn left and take a longer (clockwise) circuit past the main community orchard, but if you want to pick some fruit the walk route does go past another orchard further along.



11. The path meanders through the grassland, with pockets of woodland on both sides. At a path junction with an “Apples of the future?” information panel **turn right**, with the longer loop rejoining from the left. The all-weather path crosses over the horse ride and swings left to come to a road (Jeskyns Road).
12. Cross the road carefully into the main part of the country park, **Jeskyns Meadows**. The path swings left and then curves right to skirt around a large grazing area. **Keep right** at path junctions, passing **Henhurst Lake** on the left (with a few picnic tables ahead) and then veering up to the right.
13. The all-weather path winds its way gently uphill, passing a play area behind the hedge on the left. At a T-junction **turn right**, still alongside the grazing meadow and now with a community orchard on the left. Ignore a gate on the left leading into a meadow beyond the orchard, but shortly afterwards **turn left** at a path junction.
- For a short cut (saving 250m) you could keep ahead at this junction and resume the directions at [15].
14. On the suggested route keep ahead at the next path junction, crossing a long straight path which is one of the main routes through the park. The all-weather path swings right to go alongside a small grazing area, then curves up to the right. This brings you back to the long straight path at the highest point in the park, where there is a view through the “**Gateway**” sculpture<sup>6</sup> to the Essex hills, 10 km away to the north-west.
- At this last bend you could skip the viewpoint by going straight ahead on a grassy path to a wooden gate in the hedge (where several paths converge, including the short cut mentioned above).
15. To continue the walk leave Jeskyns Meadows through the wooden gate and go straight across a byway, passing an “Explore Cobham & Shorne's Countryside” information panel. Go through another gate into **Jeskyns Glades** and **turn left** onto the all-weather path alongside another grazing area, heading **NE**. Follow the path to the opposite corner of this less-visited part of Jeskyns and go out through a gate onto another byway.
16. Unless you want to take a look at **Ashenbank Pond** (through the gate ahead) **turn left** onto the byway, leaving the country park. Follow this potentially muddy track for 150m, climbing gently into woodland. At the start of some wooden paling on the right there is an inconspicuous Woodland Trust ‘Welcome’ marker by a gap in this fence. **Go up a short flight of steps** cut into the bank and through a metal kissing gate into **Ashenbank Wood**<sup>7</sup>.

**D. Ashenbank Wood to Cobham (The Street) (2¾ km)**

17. Follow the path into the wood, then in 40m **veer left** up another flight of earth steps, heading **N**. The path winds its way up the wooded hillside and curves round to the right, followed by a short straight stretch. After the path goes between the two parts of a fallen tree **keep right** to come to a T-junction with a broad path, with the grassy bank of a covered reservoir visible ahead through the trees.
18. At the junction **turn right** again, now heading **S** and passing some veteran sweet chestnuts. The path soon swings round to the left and emerges into a clearing with a small **Bronze Age Barrow** on the left.  
*There is an information panel about the barrow where the path re-enters the woodland, although it is somewhat speculative as the site has not been fully excavated.*
19. For the full walk follow the path back into the woodland and **fork left** at a Y-junction.
  - To cut out most of the woodland loop fork right instead, soon going down a flight of earth steps. At the bottom turn right and follow the red arrows of a waymarked woodland trail to a metal kissing gate in the south-western corner of the wood, ignoring a small metal side gate along the way. If you take this short cut (saving 1 km) resume the directions at [23].
20. For the full walk follow the left-hand path as it bends right and goes gently downhill. Go through a metal side gate beside a wooden fieldgate into a small clearing with an information panel "WW2 at Ashenbank" in front of the remnants of some wartime structures. Just past the panel a path on the right offers another short cut opportunity.
  - To cut out the northernmost part of the woodland loop turn right at this junction, then turn right again at a major path crossing in front of a wooden fieldgate (where the path ahead leads to the Woodland Trust car park). If you take this short cut (saving 400m) resume the directions at [22].
21. For the full walk keep ahead at the junction by the WW II structures, following the red arrows of a waymarked woodland trail. In about 200m, and 25m before a wooden barrier at the northern end of the wood, **veer right** to stay on the trail. The path curves round to the right and you might need to skirt around a muddy stretch where it passes a pond on the left. Keep ahead at a major path crossing, ignoring the path to the car park off to the left.
22. Go through a metal kissing gate a little way ahead and follow the waymarked trail through the wood, ignoring side paths into some 'woodland pasture' areas. After heading roughly **S** for about 400m the path swings round to the right near the fence marking the wood's southern boundary. After continuing near the edge of the wood for 250m **keep left** at path junctions to go down to a metal kissing gate in the south-western corner of the wood.
23. Leave the wood through the kissing gate, briefly re-entering Jeskyns. **Fork left** onto a grassy path going alongside a fenced-off meadow, at first with woodland on the left and then a commercial orchard. In the corner of the meadow leave Jeskyns through a wooden gate and keep ahead on an enclosed footpath.
24. At the far end bear left onto the driveway from Meadow House to reach "The Street" in Cobham (with an old water pump on the right). Turn left to go through the village, soon coming to the first of its three pubs on the left-hand side of the road, the Dickensian **Leather Bottle**<sup>10</sup>. The **Darnley Arms** is just beyond it and the **Ship Inn** 250m further along, past the **Cobham Village Store** and primary school.
  - Up a slope on the right is the large parish church of **St Mary Magdalene**<sup>8</sup>, with the **New College of Cobham**<sup>9</sup> (almshouses) directly behind it. The church is well worth a visit but the almshouses are now only occasionally open to the public.





## E. The Street to Ranscombe Farm Reserve (3 km)

25. Turn left out of any of the pubs and go up to the junction at the end of The Street. Make your way to the far side, passing the village's **War Memorial** in front of a patch of grassland with a pair of ornamental yew trees. Take the signposted byway (Lodge Lane) heading **E**, with a long avenue of lime trees off to the left.
26. After passing a string of cottages on the right and a farmyard there is a metal fieldgate across the lane by a thatched cottage (South Lodge), with a National Trust information panel for "Cobham Wood and Mausoleum". Go through a metal kissing gate to the left of the fieldgate to continue on a broad track.
27. Follow the track through the NT parkland; at some point you might be able to glimpse the baroque cupolas of **Cobham Hall**<sup>11</sup>, 500m away beyond the trees on the left. In 800m go through a metal side gate next to a cattle grid to continue through a more wooded area with some fine veteran trees. The track eventually emerges into a clearing with an imposing monument in Portland stone, the **Darnley Mausoleum**<sup>12</sup>.
28. Carry on past the monument for a further 500m, still heading **E**. Leave the NT land through a metal kissing gate and go straight ahead for 30m to a path crossing with several footpath waymarkers, on the boundary of **Ranscombe Farm Reserve**<sup>13</sup>.

*If you are doing the Alternative Walk (to Rochester), go to §K.*

## F. Through Ranscombe Farm Reserve to the Plotlands (1 • 3 • 5 km)

*If you want to do a longer walk around the nature reserve, take one of the optional extensions in [30] or [31].*

### 29. Main route (1 km)

- a. **Turn right** at the path crossing and follow the woodland path downhill for 350m. Go through a metal kissing gate into Kitchen Field, passing a carved wooden bench. Keep ahead on a clear path across this field.
- b. Go straight ahead at an oblique path crossing in the middle of the field and climb up the other side. At the top go through a metal side gate next to the fieldgate ahead into Brockles Field. Fork right onto a broad grassy path climbing gently along the field edge.
- c. In 75m keep left to climb over the brow of the hill in the centre of the field. Continue through a metal kissing gate beside a fieldgate to come to a path crossing with a marker post, with a wooden bench to enjoy the fine view ahead across the Bush Valley. **Turn right** at the path crossing to go along the hillside.

### 30. Short extension (3 km)

- a. **Keep ahead** at the path crossing and another one after 100m with a pair of marker posts (Cobham Woods). In a further 250m **take the second of two paths off to the right** at the next path junction (Five Throws), signposted to Birch Wood Corner.
- b. Follow the stony path as it goes steadily downhill for 400m, between Great Wood and Birch Wood and heading **SE**. At the bottom go through a metal side gate and **fork right** onto a farm track alongside a large farm field, with the buildings of Ranscombe Farm 500m away to the left.
- c. In the field corner follow the track round to the left, ignoring a path off to the right. In 300m, with a locked metal gate on the track to the farm buildings, **turn right** to go downhill on a fenced grassy track. At the bottom **turn right** at a T-junction, briefly joining the **North Downs Way**<sup>14</sup> (NDW).
- d. Go through a side gate beside a metal fieldgate and follow the path down to the left, across an open valley. Keep ahead at a crosspaths at the bottom of the valley and climb up the other side. Follow the path into woodland and up a few steps towards the Chatham railway line.

- e. Do not cross the railway bridge but **turn right** onto a woodland path, leaving the NDW. At a Y-junction **fork left** and continue across a small patch of grassland. Keep ahead at a marker post (Mill Hill) and follow the path on a long steady climb through Mill Hill Wood.
- f. Eventually you go up a few steps and through a kissing gate into Brockles Field, with a fine view across the Bush Valley. Keep ahead on a broad grassy path along the hillside, with the main route joining from the right at a path crossing after 150m.

### 31. Longer extension (5 km)

- a. **Keep ahead** at the path crossing and simply follow the main woodland path for 1 km, between Broad Oak Wood and Great Wood. After going straight ahead at two marked path crossings (Cobham Woods and Five Throws) there is a long and gradual descent to the far side of the woodland.
- b. Before the path reaches the high-speed railway line (with grey metal railings visible 50m ahead), **turn right** by an information panel "Explore Cobham & Cuxton's Countryside" to head **S** on a woodland ride. In 300m, where the ride veers right, **keep left** on a narrow path which comes out into a large field with a marker post (Clay Pond Wood).
- c. Turn left to go around the field edge. In 350m **veer left** into the trees, passing the next marker post (Head Barn Wood). In 250m the path curves right in front of a thin belt of trees shielding the railway and M2 motorway. Later it swings left and right to continue alongside a chainlink fence protecting the railway tracks.
- d. Follow the path down a steep little slope, past a wooden vehicle barrier and straight across a grassy track at the bottom. Continue up through the trees for a further 100m, passing another vehicle barrier and swinging round to the right, to come to a path junction with another marker post (Merrals Shaw).
- e. **Fork right** at the junction onto a broad path through this chestnut coppice, heading **SW**. In 350m the path emerges from the wood in front of Ranscombe Farm's access road. Cross over carefully and turn right onto the walkway running alongside it, joining the **North Downs Way**<sup>14</sup> (NDW).
- f. In 100m (with private driveways to a house and farm buildings ahead) **veer left** as indicated. After going through a copse the NDW continues as an enclosed track going gently downhill, with glimpses of the Medway Valley through the hedge on the left. Keep ahead at a path junction with a marker post (North Downs Way).
- g. Go through a side gate beside a metal fieldgate and follow the path down to the left, across an open valley. Keep ahead at a crosspaths at the bottom of the valley and climb up the other side. Follow the path into woodland and up a few steps towards the Chatham railway line.
- h. Do not cross the railway bridge but **turn right** onto a woodland path, leaving the NDW. At a Y-junction **fork left** and continue across a small patch of grassland. Keep ahead at a marker post (Mill Hill) and follow the path on a long steady climb through Mill Hill Wood.
- i. Eventually you go up a few steps and through a kissing gate into Brockles Field, with a fine view across the Bush Valley. Keep ahead on a broad grassy path along the hillside, with the main route joining from the right at a path crossing after 150m.

### G. The Plotlands to Cobhambury Wood (2¼ km)

- 32. As you approach a corner of the woodland **fork right** and go through a metal kissing gate into the **Plotlands**<sup>15</sup> (not the gate on the perimeter path around the field). Underneath two huge beech trees there is an information panel "The view from Brockles" and a beautifully-carved wooden bench. Take the path behind the bench into the wood, gently descending and curving round to the left.

33. In 300m the path goes past a semi-cleared area at the bottom of the slope and climbs steadily up the other side, near the southern edge of the woodland. Ignore side paths into the wood, but after 150m follow the main path as it swings right and comes to a path T-junction. **Turn left** to go back towards the woodland edge and continue just inside it.
34. Simply follow this broad straight path for a further 750m, ignoring all side paths. At the far end of the Plotlands go past a metal fieldgate and turn left onto a chalky farm track, which is also a public byway. Follow it downhill and under the railway bridge to reach a road (Cobhambury Road). Cross the road and carry on down the grassy verge, then alongside **Cobhambury Wood** to the T-junction with Warren Road.

## H. Cobhambury Wood to Henley Street (1¾ km)

35. At the road junction **turn right** onto a signposted footpath into the wood. In 300m the broad woodland path comes to a T-junction where you **turn left** as indicated. Follow this narrow path round to the right at the southern edge of the wood, with part of the large **Luddesdown Vineyard**<sup>16</sup> beyond the hedge on your left.  
*When the vineyard was being established it was reported that the owners "plan to provide benches at viewpoints to add to the enjoyment of walkers", but as most of the gaps in the hedge have been blocked off that no longer seems to apply. There is a small metal gate in the hedge (on another right of way through the vines) but no guarantee that you would be able to return to the narrow footpath further along.*
36. For the suggested route, therefore, stay on the public footpath and follow it out to a narrow lane (Batt's Road). **Turn left** briefly onto the lane, then **veer right** through a gap in the tree boundary onto the continuation of the footpath. Go all the way along the top edge of a large field, at first with a grassy bank on the right and then a tree boundary.
37. In the far corner keep ahead on a short path through a belt of trees. Go through a metal gate and down a sloping field alongside a wooden fence, then through another gate. Maintain direction across the next field to its bottom edge, where the footpath merges with another coming straight down the field. Go down between garden fences to a lane in the hamlet of Henley Street.
38. **Turn right** onto the lane (also called Henley Street), ignoring a bridleway off to the left after 150m. In a further 100m there is a second bridleway just before the car park for the **Cock Inn**, a possible refreshment stop before the final leg.  
*If you are doing the shorter ending (to Sole Street), go to §j.*

## I. Henley Street to Meopham Station (3¼ km)

39. Take the bridleway alongside the pub's car park. Beyond the pub the path climbs gently between woodland and a large farm field, both festooned with 'Private Land' notices. Follow the waymarked bridleway all the way up to a track and **turn right**, briefly rejoining the Wealdway (WW).
40. Follow the track for 300m, later curving round to the left. Where it turns right in front of a wood **keep ahead** on a narrow path into the trees, leaving the WW. Go through a metal kissing gate, a 'back door' into **Camer Park**<sup>17</sup>. In 40m you come to a T-junction with a broad path where the suggested route is to turn left, then in 30m **veer right** through a wide gap in the trees into the open parkland, dotted with fine specimen trees.
41. For the most direct route go straight ahead through this small country park. If you keep heading **W** you will pass the private grounds of Camer House off to the right after about 300m, then reach the **café** and car park on the far side in a further 250m.



42. Leave through the car park and turn right onto a lane (Camer Park Road). This leads to a T-junction with another road (Green Lane) where you turn right again. You need to **take great care as there is no pavement** on this fairly busy road with fast traffic. After an awkward 100m you reach a junction, with Norwood Lane on the left and a signposted footpath across the field to its left.

*There is a choice of routes to the station but both involve a lot of road walking. The main route starts across the field but there is an ominous "Stop the Green Belt Grab" notice on the far side. If a new housing estate materialises the alternative route in [44] along Norwood Lane might be better, although the lane has no pavement until you reach the village.*

#### 43. Main route

- a. Take the signposted footpath across the field, a faint path heading **NW** towards houses. Continue along a short alleyway and turn right onto a residential street (Tradescant Drive).
  - If you want to minimise the subsequent 750m along the A227 you could follow Tradescant Drive to the end, where a short alleyway leads back to Norwood Lane. If you do this, turn left onto the lane and switch to the directions in [44].
- b. For the main route **immediately turn left** off Tradescant Drive into Denesway, which leads to the A227. Turn right onto the walkway beside this main road, soon passing **Bartellas** (a smart restaurant and cocktail lounge) on the left.
- c. Carry on alongside the main road, past a small triangular green with a **Meopham**<sup>1</sup> village sign. In a further 100m you pass the other end of Norwood Lane on the right.

#### 44. Alternative route

Go all the way along Norwood Lane, almost 1 km. In the village the street curves gradually to the left and eventually reaches the A227. Turn right onto the main road.

45. Shortly before you branch off the A227 to the station you pass a small parade of shops on the right, including a convenience store and the **Railway Tavern**. At the end of Station Approach there is a passageway onto Platform 1 (for trains to London) to the left of the old station building, now an Indian restaurant.

#### J. Henley Street to Sole Street Station (1 km)

46. From the pub carry on along Henley Street for a further 150m, round a right-hand bend. Where the road name changes to Gold Street **turn left** onto a signposted footpath through the tree boundary. Go through a metal gate and keep ahead across a large field.
47. On the far side leave the field on a short path between fences, which comes out onto a road opposite the **Railway Inn**. The station is down the short approach road to the right of the pub. Trains to London leave from Platform 1, on the near side.

#### K. Through Ranscombe Farm Reserve to the A228 (3 • 3¼ km)

*The main route through this nature reserve is mostly along an open valley, noted for its wildflowers. The more wooded alternative route in [49] utilises the longer extension on the Main Walk.*

#### 48. Main route (3 km)

- a. **Turn right** at the path crossing and follow the woodland path downhill for 350m. Go through a metal kissing gate into Kitchen Field, passing a carved wooden bench. Keep ahead on a clear path across this field.
- b. In the centre of Kitchen Field **turn half-left** an oblique path crossing. At the edge of the field go through a metal gate onto a path through a copse, emerging into a long broad valley. Follow a clear grassy path straight ahead through wildflower meadows, farm fields and then scrubland for 1 km.

- c. At the far end the path curves right towards an arch under the railway, but 40m before reaching it **go up steps on the left** signposted to "The Valley Car Park". Go through a metal gate onto a fenced path, with a field sloping up to the left and the Chatham railway line behind a belt of trees on the right.  
*Along the way you pass an attractive new wooden bench, with a fine view back up the valley.*
- d. The path goes over a small rise and descends. On the far side go through a gate and down steps to a track. Turn right briefly onto the track, then almost immediately **turn left** up steps by a marker post (Pebble Lane) into the corner of another field (Longhoses).
- e. Turn left onto a path going around the field edge, with views of the **River Medway** as you continue along the top of the field. In the far corner go straight across Ranscombe Farm's access road into a small field. **Turn right** onto a chalky path along the field edge, parallel to the road.
- f. In the bottom field corner go through a wooden kissing gate (with a "Ranscombe Farm Reserve" information panel) and down through a belt of trees to the reserve's small car park, joining the **North Downs Way**<sup>14</sup> (NDW). Follow the access road out to the A228 and turn left onto the main road.

#### 49. Alternative route (3¼ km)

- a. **Keep ahead** at the path crossing and simply follow the main woodland path for 1 km, between Broad Oak Wood and Great Wood. After going straight ahead at two marked path crossings (Cobham Woods and Five Throws) there is a long and gradual descent to the far side of the woodland.
- b. Before the path reaches the high-speed railway line (with grey metal railings visible 50m ahead), **turn right** by an information panel "Explore Cobham & Cuxton's Countryside" to head **S** on a woodland ride. In 300m, where the ride veers right, **keep left** on a narrow path which comes out into a large field with a marker post (Clay Pond Wood).
- c. Turn left to go around the field edge. In 350m **veer left** into the trees, passing the next marker post (Head Barn Wood). In 250m the path curves right in front of a thin belt of trees shielding the railway and M2 motorway. Later it swings left and right to continue alongside a chainlink fence protecting the railway tracks.
- d. Follow the path down a steep little slope, past a wooden vehicle barrier and straight across a grassy track at the bottom. Continue up through the trees for a further 100m, passing another vehicle barrier and swinging round to the right, to come to a path junction with another marker post (Merrals Shaw).
- e. **Keep left** at the junction, signposted to the Car Park. Stay on the main path as it heads roughly **S** near the eastern edge of the wood, ignoring a few side paths. In 300m the path swings round to the right near the corner of the wood.
- f. The path leads out to Ranscombe Farm's access road in a further 200m, but the suggested route is to **veer left** down a short path through the trees just before reaching the road, coming out into a small field. Take a chalky path along its edge, parallel to the road.
  - Locals have also made an unofficial path into the field 75m earlier, with a short cut across the field to the exit.
- g. In the bottom field corner go through a wooden kissing gate (with a "Ranscombe Farm Reserve" information panel) and down through a belt of trees to the reserve's small car park, joining the **North Downs Way**<sup>14</sup> (NDW). Follow the access road out to the A228 and turn left onto the main road.

## L. The A228 to The Esplanade (3¼ km)

50. Unless you want to catch a bus to Rochester from the stop here, follow the NDW along a walkway towards the river crossing, starting by going round in an arc to pass under the A228 via a subway. Turn left on the other side, then **fork left** at a Y-junction to climb back to the road level.
51. Follow the walkway past a **plaque**<sup>18</sup> and across the three viaducts (the High Speed Railway and the two carriageways of the M2). In a further 150m **turn right** as indicated onto a cycleway, curving down towards the motorway and onto the viaduct. You cross the wide river high above Wickham Reach, with Rochester Castle and Cathedral visible 2¼ km downstream.

*As you approach Wouldham Road on the far side it is worth looking down at the shoreline to see if the riverside path below the viaducts is flooded, which would make the alternative route below impracticable.*

52. There is another opportunity to catch a bus to Rochester (the stop is off to the left on Wouldham Road), but to continue the walk **turn sharp left** onto a broad tree-lined track just before reaching the road. Follow the track gently downhill towards the river. Halfway down you go through a wooden side gate onto the end of a residential street (Warwick Crescent).

*If you are satisfied that the (slightly awkward) riverside path is not flooded you could take the alternative route in [54], which includes an interesting view beneath the viaducts.*

### 53. Main route

- a. Turn right onto Warwick Crescent. Where it curves up to the right by the last of three side streets on the left (none with links to the riverside path) **keep ahead** on a broad path between garden fences.
- b. Where this swings up to the right **turn left** onto a signposted footpath and follow it downhill between more garden fences. At the bottom turn right at a path T-junction.

### 54. Alternative route

- a. Go straight across Warwick Crescent (slightly to the right) and take the access road down to "Safety Bay", a riverside development. Shortly before the road swings round to the right **bear left** onto a side path which goes through a small patch of wasteland and drops down to meet the riverside footpath directly below the first of the three viaducts.
- b. Turn right and follow the narrow path alongside the retaining wall of the new road. After passing some old vessels moored on the river the path swings inland to pass between a marina and garden fences. Keep ahead at a footpath junction, where the main route joins from the right.

55. The path soon comes out onto a road by the entrance to **Medway Marina**. Keep ahead past a boatyard and bear left onto the signposted **Medway Valley Walk**<sup>19</sup> (MVW), a tree-lined path between a recreation ground and **Baty's Marsh**<sup>20</sup>.

- There are steps down onto the salt marsh here and 200m further on, with grassy paths leading towards the river if you want to explore the area, but no convenient link route across the myriad of small water channels.

56. In 200m you pass the second flight of steps onto the salt marsh and several linking paths to playing fields on the right. In a further 200m the footpath goes past a small patch of grassland with an information panel about **Borstal**<sup>21</sup> onto a riverfront road (The Esplanade).



## M. The Esplanade to Rochester Station (2¼ km)

57. Go along The Esplanade for 1 km. Bear left in front of the first apartment block on the left to stay alongside the river. The path goes round a small headland and continues along the edge of **Esplanade Gardens**, eventually passing a children's playground and boat club buildings.
- If you want to go straight to the main cluster of refreshment places, keep ahead to the T-junction with the A2 by **Rochester Bridge**<sup>22</sup> and turn right to come to the start of the High Street.
58. For the suggested route (which passes the castle keep and cathedral) **veer right** onto a tarmac path which skirts a small ornamental area and goes back to the road. Cross over and take the narrow street opposite (Bakers Walk) curving up alongside the outer wall of **Rochester Castle**<sup>23</sup>.
59. Go through a gap in this wall into the castle gardens, passing the staircase entrance to the keep and then curving round to the right. Make your way over to the eastern side of the gardens and go out through a gate onto a street (Castle Hill), which turns right and leads into Boley Hill.
60. Go up to the west door of **Rochester Cathedral**<sup>24</sup>, which if open is well worth visiting. At the time of writing visitors are directed to leave by its north door, from which you can go through Deanery Gate on the right and turn left past the War Memorial to reach the High Street.
- From the west door of the cathedral you could simply head back along Boley Hill to reach the High Street.
61. There are many possible refreshment places on and around the High Street. The station is on the far side of the A2 (Corporation Street), which runs parallel to it. The most interesting link route is 100m further down from the War Memorial, via an attractive cul-de-sac called **La Providence**<sup>25</sup>.
- The public footpath on this link route is closed after 9pm. A simple alternative route is along Northgate, the continuation of Boley Hill on the other side of the High Street.
62. On the suggested route, turn off the High Street into La Providence. In the far left-hand corner there is a flight of steps down to a passageway, which leads out through a gate onto Corporation Street. Cross the main road at the pedestrian lights on the left, which are directly opposite the station entrance. Trains to London leave from Platform 1.

 Rochester

## Walk Notes

- Meopham** is a 'linear village' consisting of four settlements strung out for 5 km along the A227. The northernmost area is Hook Green (or Meopham Station); to the south are Dodmore, Meopham Green and Culverstone Green.
- St Mildred, Nurstead** mostly dates from the 15<sup>th</sup>C. Mildred (or Mildrith) was Abbess of Minster in the 8<sup>th</sup>C; she is depicted with her attribute (a stag) on the large east window.
- Nurstead Court** was built in 1320 for the Bishop of London, but the manor house was heavily modified in the 19<sup>th</sup>C when half of its great hall was pulled down and replaced by a stuccoed brick villa. It is listed Grade I and is now a wedding and entertainments venue.
- The **Wealdway** runs for 130 km through the Kent and Sussex Weald, from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the outskirts of Eastbourne.
- Jeskyns Community Woodland** was acquired by the Forestry Commission in 2005 with a government grant to convert an old farm into a recreational open space. Many trees have been planted but there is also much open grassland as well as a community orchard where visitors can pick fruit for personal consumption.

6. The **"Gateway"** sculpture of two tall oak figures was carved in 2006-7 by the artist Walter Bailey.
7. **Ashenbank Wood** is a 74-acre site of broadleaved woodland, owned and managed by the Woodland Trust. It was once part of the Cobham Hall Estate and contains many ancient or veteran sweet chestnuts which were part of Humphry Repton's landscape design. A **Bronze Age Barrow** at the highest part of the wood is believed to date from 2000-1500 BC.
8. **St Mary Magdalene, Cobham** dates from 1220, its large size reflecting its patronage by the wealthy de Cobham family. The magnificent alabaster and black marble **Brooke Tomb** was built in 1561 (probably by Belgian craftsmen) for George Brooke (Lord Cobham) and his wife Anne, and shows their ten sons and four daughters. The church has a fine collection of **medieval brasses**, which were restored and relaid in the Chancel in 1837.
9. The **New College of Cobham** was built in 1362 as a home for priests. It was dissolved in the Reformation and subsequently converted to almshouses in 1598, with the hall being retained as a meeting place. It was modernised in 1981 and is still available as housing for local pensioners.
10. The **Leather Bottle** is festooned with **Charles Dickens** memorabilia, on the slender grounds that the author wrote some chapters of *The Pickwick Papers* while staying at this coaching inn and mentions it in the novel.
11. **Cobham Hall** was the home of the Earls of Darnley, who extended the original Tudor house in the 18<sup>th</sup>C and had the surrounding parkland landscaped by Humphry Repton. The Darnleys sold the house in 1957 and it is now a public school for girls.
12. The **Darnley Mausoleum** was completed in 1786 but for obscure reasons it was not consecrated and so never used for interments. After the Darnley family sold Cobham Hall it became prone to vandalism and was badly damaged in an arson attack in 1980. The project to restore the historic landscape of **Cobham Park** (including this Grade I monument) began in 2001.
13. **Ranscombe Farm Reserve** is a working farm managed by **Plantlife**, "the charity that speaks up for the nation's wild plants". It contains some attractive wildflower meadows on chalk grassland and large areas of ancient woodland.
14. The **North Downs Way** runs for 246 km along the length of the North Downs (with two sections at its eastern end), from Farnham in Surrey to Dover in Kent.
15. The **Plotlands** is an area of woodland which the Darnley estate sold off as small leisure plots in the 1970s. Many plots became neglected and in 2000 the **West Kent Downs Countryside Trust** was set up to acquire as many of them as possible and "promote public enjoyment of the woodland".
16. **Luddesdown Vineyard** was planted with Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier vines in 2019 and produces sparkling wine. Created from what was previously arable farmland (Court and Brookers Organic Farm), its size of 300-400 acres makes it one of the largest vineyards in England.
17. **Camer Park** consists of about 45 acres of mature parkland. It was formerly a country estate which was sold to the local council in 1967 and opened to the public a few years later. Camer House remained in private hands and can be seen from the northern boundary of the park.
18. The **plaque** records that a Eurostar train set a UK Rail Speed Record of 208mph while crossing the Medway Viaduct on a test run on 30 July 2003.
19. The **Medway Valley Walk** runs alongside the river for 31 km, between Rochester and Tonbridge.
20. **Baty's Marsh** is one of the last patches of salt marsh on this stretch of the river, where plants have colonised mudflats in sheltered water. This nature reserve is named after a local resident who led a campaign in the 1980s to prevent Borstal Marsh from being drained and developed for housing.
21. In 1902 **Borstal** became the site of the first purpose-built detention centre for young offenders, which gave its name to other such institutions across the UK. They were replaced by youth custody centres in 1982.

22. **Rochester Bridge** is on the Roman road from Richborough to London (Watling Street, now the A2) and the Romans built the first bridge soon after the invasion in AD 43. After it was washed away by floods in 1381 a stone bridge was constructed and this in turn was replaced by a cast-iron bridge in 1856. There used to be two railway bridges alongside it but in the 1960s one was converted to double the capacity for road traffic.
23. **Rochester Castle** was built soon after the Norman conquest and contains one of the best-preserved Norman keeps in the country, although the internal floors and roof have not survived. It was besieged several times in the civil wars of the 13<sup>th</sup>C and again during the Peasant's Revolt in 1381.
24. **Rochester Cathedral** was completed in the early 12<sup>th</sup>C, replacing an earlier Saxon cathedral. The Great West Door and parts of the nave are recognisably Norman but much of the rest of the building has been altered or rebuilt over the centuries.
25. The buildings in **La Providence** (originally Theobald Square) are almshouses for the descendants of Huguenots. A **French Hospital** was founded in Finsbury in 1718 to support poor French Protestants fleeing religious persecution; the institution moved out of London in the 1940s and has been located in Rochester since 1959.

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