



# Meopham to Rochester walk

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

<b>Length</b>	<p><b>Main Walk:</b> 19½ km (12.1 miles). Four hours 25 minutes walking time. For the whole excursion including trains, sights and meals, allow at least 9 hours.</p> <p><b>Main Walk, starting from Sole Street:</b> 18½ km (11.5 miles). Four hours 10 minutes walking time.</p> <p><b>Short Circular Walk, from Sole Street:</b> 16 km (9.9 miles). Three hours 45 minutes walking time.</p> <p><b>Mid Circular Walk, from Meopham:</b> 19¼ km<sup>†</sup> (12.0 miles). Four hours 30 minutes walking time.</p> <p><b>Long Circular Walk, from Meopham:</b> 22¼ km<sup>†</sup> (13.8 miles). Five hours 15 minutes walking time.</p> <p>† Subtract 1 km (0.6 miles; 15 minutes) if starting from Sole Street and/or 2¼ km (1.4 miles; 30 minutes) if finishing there. See Walk Options &amp; Transport below.</p>
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<b>OS Map</b>	Explorer 148. Meopham, map reference TQ641679, is in Kent, 6 km <b>S</b> of Gravesend.
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<b>Toughness</b>	3 out of 10 (4 & 5 for the two Meopham Circular Walks).
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<b>Features</b>	<p>This walk starts in the <b>Kent Downs</b> and ends in a town full of historical interest, with a variety of landscapes in between. After an opening stretch across the chalk grassland it continues through redundant farmland being transformed into <b>Jeskyns Community Woodland</b>. A loop around <b>Ashenbank Wood's</b> fine collection of veteran trees leads 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 medieval brasses which were fortunate to survive the religious upheavals of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>C.</p>
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After lunch the walk goes through the landscaped parkland of **Cobham Park** with its restored neo-classical monument, the **Darnley Mausoleum**. It continues through the whole length of **Ranscombe Farm Reserve**, a mixed landscape of woods, fields and meadows which claims to be one of Britain's most important sites for wildflowers.

The remainder of the Main Walk is distinctly less rural. 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) offers some compensation. The final riverside stretch leads 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.

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.

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### Walk Options

Even with its sweeping river views and historical interest, the long stretch across the motorway bridge and the urban ending in Rochester will not be to everyone's taste. Directions have therefore been provided for two **Circular Walk** options looping back to Meopham. The shorter one includes open views across the downs from the western edge of Ranscombe Farm, while the longer one takes in more of the nature reserve before looping back through Cobham Wood. The two variations rejoin in the **Plotlands** (community woodland) and later go along the edge of a large new **vineyard**. The ending to Meopham station also goes through **Camer Park**, a small country park.

**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 the start (and finish of the circular walks) has to include an uninspiring stretch along a busy main road. Alternative directions have therefore been provided both starting from and finishing at Sole Street; these shorter routes can be substituted for any of the Meopham walk options.

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.

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### 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 in this new version, and even that is in the reverse direction.

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### 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 a half-hourly semi-fast service

(Mon–Sat) taking 33 minutes. At the end of the Main Walk there are frequent trains back from Rochester as this station is served by High Speed and Thameslink trains via Strood and Gravesend as well as the Victoria trains.

Buy a **return to Rochester** for the Main Walk; you can then buy a 'High Speed Upgrade' at Rochester station if you decide to travel back on this route. For the Circular Walks a **return to Sole Street** is more flexible as it is also valid from Meopham.

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 more direct route.

Halfway through the afternoon of the Main Walk there are two convenient bus services to Rochester: from outside Ranscombe Farm and along Wouldham Road on the other side of the river (both hourly Mon–Sat, two-hourly Sun). 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 park at Meopham costs £5.30 Mon–Fri; the one at Sole Street is £4.40. Both are £2.70 Sat, £1 Sun & BH (2021). Street parking around both stations is possible at weekends, but the areas are covered by Controlled Parking Zones on weekdays.

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

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**Lunch** There is a choice of three pubs along the main street through **Cobham**, after around 8 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).

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**Tea** At the end of the **Main Walk** there are many possible refreshment places in and around **Rochester's** High Street. 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, but there are many alternatives as well as pubs for stronger fare. There is also a **BeeZoo** coffee shop in the station building. *It has not been possible to try any of these tea places. This section will be reviewed when more places re-open.*

At the point where the two **Circular Walk** endings split the **Cock Inn** (01474-814208) in **Henley Street** is a traditional village pub, and there are similar watering holes next to both stations: the **Railway Tavern** (01474-813211) at **Meopham** and the **Railway Inn** (01474-814375) at **Sole Street**. The two 'railway pubs' are both normally open all day, useful if you have a long wait for a train. There is also a café in **Camer Park** on the Meopham ending, but this has no fixed hours so might be closed by the time you pass through.

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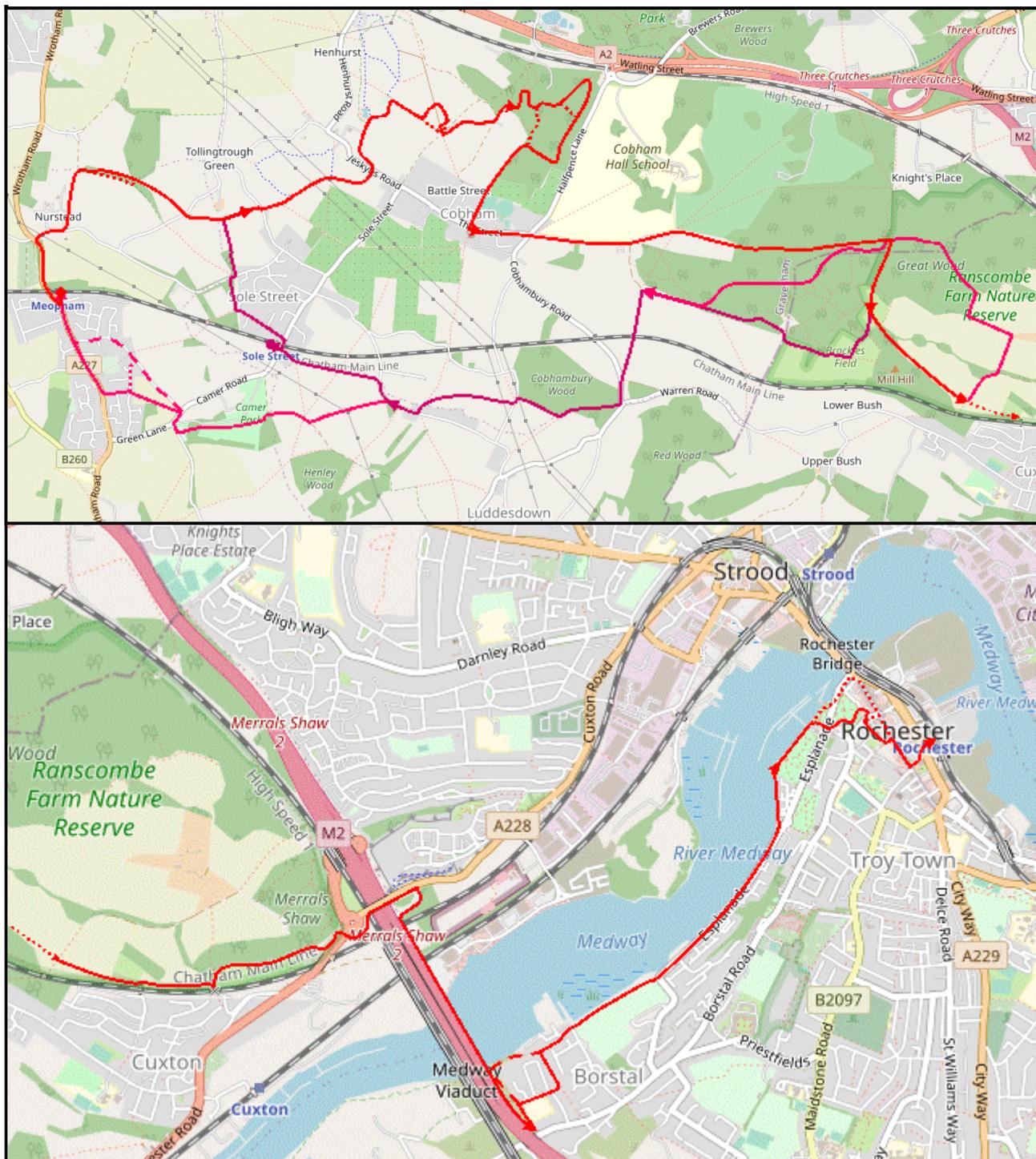
**Help Us!** After the walk, we would love to get your feedback

You can upload photos to the  SWC Group on Flickr (upload your photos) and videos to  Youtube. This walk's tags are:



# Walk Directions

## Walk Maps



## Walk Options ( Main | Circ. )

### M. Main Walk (19½ km)

- a. Main Walk, starting from Sole Street (18½ km)
- b. Short Circular Walk, from Sole Street (16 km)
- c. Mid Circular Walk, from Meopham (19¼ km)
- d. Long Circular Walk, from Meopham (22¼ 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 out of **Meopham**<sup>1</sup>, going over the railway bridge and steadily uphill for 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 field, climbing gently towards the middle of a copse on the horizon. Follow a path through this and keep ahead across the next field to a lane (Copt Hall Road).
5. Cross the lane and go over a stile onto the continuation of the footpath, a short grassy strip between fences. At the end go over another stile and **turn half-left** to go diagonally across several paddocks, using the gaps in the wooden fences. After the last paddock maintain direction across the corner of a large field towards a metal fieldgate. Go through either of the gaps beside the gate and take the broad cinder track ahead, with paddocks on both sides.
  - Judging by gaps in the fences it appears that the official right of way is just inside the paddocks on the right, but the horses can be frisky and the equestrian centre staff seem to prefer it if walkers use the track.

*Continue the directions at §C.*

### B. Sole Street Station to Cranbourne Equestrian (1½ 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 metal fieldgate on the right, with footpath waymarkers on both sides. Go through either of the gaps beside the gate and take the broad cinder track ahead, with paddocks on both sides.
  - Judging by gaps in the fences it appears that the official right of way is just inside the paddocks on the right, but the horses can be frisky and the equestrian centre staff seem to prefer it if walkers use the track.

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

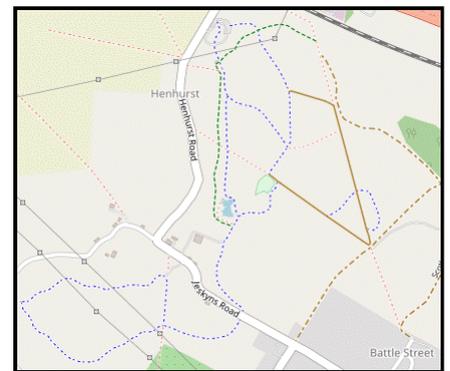
9. At the far end of the track go out past a wooden fieldgate (or through a gap from the last paddock). Turn right briefly onto a lane (Round Street), then in 25m **turn left** onto the continuation of the footpath, a narrow enclosed path. After going through a wooden kissing gate ignore a waymarker 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 popular 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 particularly 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**.

- If you want to pick some fruit you would have to turn left instead and take a longer (clockwise) route around this loop to go past the main community orchard.

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**. Follow the path as it swings left and then right to skirt around a large grazing area. On the left you pass the Tree Nursery and then **Henhurst Lake**, with a few picnic tables ahead. You could detour around this rather small pond (with a short boardwalk on the far side), but for the main route **fork right** where the all-weather path splits.
13. The path winds its way gently uphill, passing a play area behind the hedge on the left. At a T-junction **turn right**, away from the car park and café and soon with grazing meadows on both sides. Ignore a gate leading into the left-hand meadow but shortly afterwards **veer 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. Follow the path as it swings right to go alongside a small grazing area. At the end the all-weather path curves up to the right to go back towards the long straight path, while a grassy path leads to a wooden gate in the hedge ahead.
  - The exit from Jeskyns Meadows is through this gate (where several paths converge, including the short cut mentioned above), but you might like to follow the all-weather path round to the highest point in the park for the view from the “**Gateway**” sculpture<sup>6</sup> to the Essex hills, 10km away to the north-west.
15. To continue the walk go through the wooden gate and straight across a byway, passing an “Explore Cobham & Shorne's Countryside” information panel. Go through another gate into **Jeskyns Glades** and **immediately turn left** onto the all-weather path between the hedge and a 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 wooden paling on the right **squeeze through a small gap in this fence** (with a small green 'Welcome' marker). Go up a few steps cut into the bank and through a metal kissing gate, a 'back door' into the Woodland Trust's **Ashenbank Wood**<sup>7</sup>.

#### D. Ashenbank Wood to Cobham (The Street) (2½ 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 **fork right** to come to a T-junction with a broad path, with the grassy bank of a low 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** where it splits just inside the wood.
- 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 WWII structures, following the red arrows of a waymarked woodland trail. In about 200m, and 25m before coming to a wooden barrier at the northern end of the wood, **turn right** at a path junction to stay on the trail. The path curves round to the right and passes a muddy pond on the left. Keep ahead when you reach 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 and comes close to the fence marking the wood's southern boundary. Where a red arrow points uphill to the right after 250m **keep ahead** towards a metal kissing gate in the south-western corner of the wood.
23. Leave the wood through the kissing gate, briefly re-entering Jeskyns. Ignore a path straight ahead and **veer left** onto a path 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 join the driveway leading away from Meadow House to reach "The Street" in Cobham (with an old water pump on the right). Turn left to go through the village.
- Up a slope on the right the large parish church of **St Mary Magdalene**<sup>8</sup> is well worth a visit, as is the **New College of Cobham**<sup>9</sup> (almshouses) directly behind it.
25. There are three possible lunch pubs on the left-hand side of The Street in the next 300m: the Dickensian **Leather Bottle**<sup>10</sup>, the **Darnley Arms** and (after passing the **Cobham Village Store** and primary school) the **Ship Inn**.

## E. The Street to Kitchen Field (3½ km)

26. At the end of The Street make your way to the far side of a roundabout, passing the village's **War Memorial**. Take the signposted byway (Lodge Lane) in the same direction, with a long avenue of lime trees off to the left. After passing a string of cottages on the right and then a farmyard you reach a metal fieldgate across the lane by a thatched cottage (South Lodge), with a National Trust information panel for "Cobham Wood and Mausoleum".
27. Go through a metal kissing gate to the left of the fieldgate to continue on a broad track through the NT parkland (at some point you might be able to glimpse the baroque cupolas of **Cobham Hall**<sup>11</sup> through the trees on the left, 500m away). 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.
28. Eventually the track emerges into a clearing with an imposing monument in Portland stone, the **Darnley Mausoleum**<sup>12</sup>. Carry on past the monument for a further 500m, leaving the NT land through a metal kissing gate and entering a wooded part of **Ranscombe Farm Reserve**<sup>13</sup>. Ignore a path off to the right by the gate, but in 25m **turn right** at a path crossing with footpath waymarkers.
29. Follow the woodland path downhill for 350m. Go straight across a bridleway and through a metal kissing gate into Kitchen Field, with a carved wooden bench to enjoy the view. Keep ahead on a clear path to a waymarker post at an oblique path junction in the centre of the field.  
*If you are doing the Short or Mid Circular Walks, go to §K.*

## F. Kitchen Field to The Valley (1 km)

30. **Turn half-left** at the 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 grassy path straight ahead through this wildflower meadow, ignoring a footpath off to the right after 500m. In a further 100m you come to a path crossing with the **North Downs Way**<sup>14</sup> (NDW).  
*If you are doing the Long Circular Walk, go to §J.*

## G. The Valley to Wouldham Road (3½ km)

31. Keep ahead at the path crossing. At the end of the meadow the path continues alongside a fenced-off field. Where it bends right towards a bridge under the railway **go up steps on the left** and through a metal gate to continue on an enclosed path close to the railway tracks. After going over a small rise the path descends and you go through another gate and down steps to a track.
32. Turn right briefly onto the track, then **turn left** up steps into the corner of another field. Turn left onto a path around the edge and along the top of Longhoses, soon with views of the **River Medway**.
33. In the far corner go across the farm access road and **turn right** onto a path alongside it. Go past an information panel for "Ranscombe Farm Reserve" and down through a belt of trees to rejoin the access road, with another panel for "Explore Cobham & Cuxton's Countryside" opposite. Go out through the reserve's small parking area to the A228.
34. Unless you want to catch a bus to Rochester from the stop here, follow the well-signposted NDW for the onward route to the river crossing. You first need to get to the other side of the A228 and to avoid crossing the walkway goes round in an arc to a subway. On the other side fork left onto a path which climbs back to the road level, passing a **plaque**<sup>15</sup> near the top.
35. Follow the walkway across the High Speed Railway and the two road viaducts carrying the M2. In a further 150m turn right as indicated onto a cycleway, which curves down to the motorway. Carry on across the wide river, high above Wickham Reach and with Rochester Castle and Cathedral visible 2¼ km downstream.  
*As you approach 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 in §H impracticable.*

## H. Wouldham Road to Rochester Esplanade (2½ km)

36. Unless you want to catch a bus to Rochester, **turn sharp left** onto a broad tree-lined track just before the cycleway comes out onto Wouldham Road (the bus stop is off to the left). Follow the track gently downhill towards the river. Halfway down, 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 [38], which includes an interesting view beneath the viaducts.

### 37. Main route

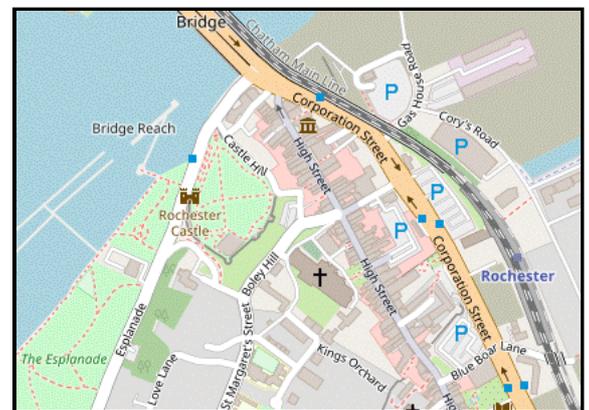
- a. Turn right onto Warwick Crescent. Where it curves up to the right by the last of three side streets on the left (none with links to the riverside path) **keep ahead** on a broad path between garden fences.
- b. Where this swings up to the right **turn left** onto a signposted footpath and follow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

### 38. 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.
39. 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>16</sup> (MVW), a tree-lined path between a recreation ground and **Baty's Marsh**<sup>17</sup>.
- There are steps down onto the salt marsh and a grassy path leading towards the river if you want to explore, but no convenient onward path across its myriad of small water channels.
40. In 200m there is a second flight of steps onto the salt marsh (with another opportunity for an out-and-back detour) and linking paths on the right to more playing fields. In a further 200m the footpath goes past a small patch of grassland with an information panel about **Borstal**<sup>18</sup> onto a riverfront road (The Esplanade).
41. Carry on along The Esplanade for 1 km. Bear left in front of the first apartment block on the left to stay on the riverfront. The path goes round a small headland and continues along the edge of an open space, **Rochester Esplanade**.

#### I. Rochester Esplanade to Rochester Station (1 km)

42. Carry on along the riverfront towards **Rochester Bridge**<sup>19</sup>, eventually passing a children's playground and boat club buildings onto a smaller part of the Esplanade. For the suggested route (which passes the castle keep and cathedral on the way to the High Street) **veer right** onto a tarmac path which skirts a small ornamental area and goes back to the road.
- If you want to go straight to the main cluster of refreshment places, keep ahead to the T-junction with the A2 by the town bridge and turn right to come to the start of the High Street.



43. Cross over the road and take the narrow street opposite (Bakers Walk) curving up alongside the outer wall of **Rochester Castle**<sup>20</sup>. Go through a gap in this wall into the castle gardens. Follow the path past the staircase entrance to the keep and round to the right. Leave the castle gardens through the gate on its eastern side.
44. Follow the street (Castle Hill, then Boley Hill) round to the west door of **Rochester Cathedral**<sup>21</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 then turn left past the War Memorial to reach the High Street.
- From the west door of the cathedral you can simply head north along Boley Hill to reach the High Street.

45. There are many possible refreshment places along the High Street. The station is on the far side of the A2 (Corporation Street), which runs parallel to it. From the War Memorial, the most interesting link route between the two is 100m further from the river, via an attractive street called **La Providence**<sup>22</sup>. *The public footpath on this 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.*
46. La Providence is a cul-de-sac but in the far left-hand corner there are steps down to a passageway leading out through a gate onto Corporation Street. Cross this main road at the pedestrian lights on the left, which are directly opposite the station. Trains to London leave from Platform 1.

## J. The Valley to Lodge Farm Track (4 km)

47. **Turn left** at the path crossing, briefly joining the NDW. Follow the path up the side of the valley, then curving round to the right. Go through a metal side gate and fork left at a path junction, leaving the NDW. Follow a fenced grassy track uphill between large fields. After the track levels out turn left at a T-junction onto a farm track with a tall hedge on the left.
48. At Birch Wood Corner ignore a path ahead and follow the track round to the right, with woodland on your left. In the next corner bear left through a metal kissing gate beside a fieldgate, now with woodland on both sides. The track curves round to the right and winds its way steadily uphill, eventually coming to a major path junction (Five Throws) in a small clearing.
49. **Turn half-left** onto the broad path signposted to the Mausoleum, heading **W**. Keep ahead at the next path junction (Cobham Woods) and then a waymarked footpath crossing, briefly retracing a short distance of your outward route to return to the gate leading into the NT parkland.
50. Do not go through the gate but **turn left** onto the path alongside the wire fence. You are now on the **Darnley Trail**<sup>23</sup> (DT), waymarked with a white arrow on a black disc, and will be following it along the northern edge of the **Plotlands**<sup>24</sup> for the next 1½ km. The perimeter path soon turns right and follows an undulating course through the woodland, staying alongside the NT boundary fence and with the Mausoleum visible through a gap in the trees after 400m.
- There are kissing gates in the boundary fence at regular intervals if you want to detour back into the NT parkland.
51. In a further 400m the trail zig-zags right and left to go past one of these gates; you could carry straight on downhill as the two paths soon rejoin, but the waymarked route has steps and is easier. The trail continues to go gently downhill and later curves round to the left to come to a path junction on the southern edge of the wood.
52. Although you could stay on the perimeter path as indicated by a footpath signpost, the suggested route is to switch to the broad grassy track running along the bottom of the wood. At the end of the Plotlands go past a metal fieldgate and turn left onto a chalky farm track, which is also a public byway.
- Continue the directions at §L.*

## K. Kitchen Field to Lodge Farm Track (2 km)

53. **Keep ahead** at the path crossing to climb up the other side of the field. At the top go through a metal side gate into Brockles Field. Fork right onto a broad grassy path climbing gently along the edge of the field, then fork left towards a waymarker post on the brow of the hill. Go past this and downhill for 100m to a path crossing with another post and a wooden bench to enjoy the view across the Bush valley.
54. **Turn right** at the path crossing to go along the side of the hill. As you approach a corner of the woodland there is an information panel "The view from Brockles" (and a nicely-carved wooden bench) just inside a metal gate leading into the trees, but the route continues straight ahead through a side gate to the right of a metal fieldgate, keeping the wood on your right.
55. In the field corner keep ahead on a narrow path through a belt of trees into the corner of the next field, with another wooden bench. Continue along the grassy path on the right-hand field edge, gently downhill. In the bottom corner bear right through a metal gate onto a grassy track, leaving Ranscombe Farm Reserve and entering the **Plotlands**<sup>24</sup>.

56. Where the track opens out into a semi-cleared area (with metal fieldgates on both sides) **turn left** through a kissing gate beside the left-hand gate. Follow a straight woodland path as it climbs steadily for 200m, then swings right into the wood and comes to a path T-junction. **Turn left** to resume your previous direction, gradually returning to the southern edge of the woodland.
57. Simply follow this broad path all the way to the far end, ignoring paths into the wood. At the end of the Plotlands go past a metal fieldgate and turn left onto a chalky farm track, which is also a public byway.

#### L. Lodge Farm Track to Henley Street (2½ km)

58. Follow the farm track downhill and under the railway bridge to reach a road (Cobhambury Road). Cross it carefully and turn left to go downhill on the field margin, then for a short distance on the road itself alongside **Cobhambury Wood**. At a road junction **turn right** onto a signposted footpath into this wood, going past a metal fieldgate onto a broad woodland path.
59. In 300m **turn left** at a T-junction onto a narrower path. At the southern edge of the wood follow the path round to the right, with part of the large new **Luddesdown Vineyard**<sup>25</sup> beyond the hedge on your left. *The new vineyard owners have stated that they “plan to provide benches at viewpoints to add to the enjoyment of walkers”, and periodic gaps in the hedge give the impression that it is acceptable to walk along the wide field margin instead of the narrow public footpath.*
60. The footpath eventually comes out onto a narrow lane (Batt's Road), with a gap in the hedge if you need to exit from the vineyard in the field corner. **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.
61. 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.
62. **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 §N.*

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

63. Take the bridleway alongside the pub's car park. Beyond the pub the path climbs gently with a large field on the right and private woodland on the left. Where the path splits the right of way is the slightly sunken left-hand path, although some walkers clearly prefer the field edge. At the end **turn right** onto a track, briefly rejoining the Wealdway (WW).
64. 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, an unsignposted 'back door' into **Camer Park**<sup>26</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 onto the open parkland, dotted with fine specimen trees.
65. Take any route across this small country park. The most direct route is straight ahead; if you stay fairly close to the woodland boundary on the right you will come to the café and car park on the far side in about 600m.
66. 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** along this fairly busy road with fast traffic.
67. After an awkward 100m you reach a junction with Norwood Lane on the left. There is a signposted footpath across the field to the left of the lane, and a choice of routes to **Meopham**<sup>1</sup> village (neither particularly appealing).  
*The main route in [68] starts along the footpath but the final 750m is beside the busy A227. The alternative route in [69] is mostly along Norwood Lane with just 300m beside the main road, but the lane has no pavement until you get to the village.*

## 68. Main route

- a. Take the signposted footpath across the field, a long straight 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 walk along the main road 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 street and switch to the directions in [69].
- 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 and follow it for 750m, passing a small triangular green on the left (Hook Green, with a Meopham village sign) and Norwood Lane on the right.

## 69. 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 walkway beside this main road and follow it for 300m.

70. Near the station you pass a small parade of shops on the right, including a convenience store and the **Railway Tavern**. To complete the walk keep ahead along its short approach road. There is a passageway onto Platform 1 (for trains to London) to the left of the old station building, now an Indian restaurant.

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

71. 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.
72. 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.

## Walk Notes

1. **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.
2. **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, and is depicted with her attribute (a stag) on the large east window.
3. **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.
4. The **Wealdway** runs for 130 km through the Kent and Sussex Weald, from Gravesend on the Thames estuary to the outskirts of Eastbourne.
5. **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 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 **plaque** records that a Eurostar train set a UK Rail Speed Record of 238mph while crossing the Medway Viaduct on a test run on 30 July 2003.
16. The **Medway Valley Walk** runs alongside the river for 31 km, between Rochester and Tonbridge.
17. **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 local 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.
18. 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.
19. **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. At one time there were two railway bridges alongside it but in the 1960s one was converted to double the capacity for road traffic.
20. **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.
21. **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.
22. 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.
23. The **Darnley Trail** is a 10 km circular walk from Shorne Woods Country Park through the undulating countryside once owned by the Earls of Darnley, taking in many of the same features as this walk.
24. 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”.
25. **Luddesdown Vineyard** was planted with Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier vines in 2019 and should start producing sparkling wine in 2022. 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.
26. **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.

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