

Saved haven

A self guided walk around Sandwich in Kent



Explore the streets of England's best-preserved medieval town
Find out how Sandwich survived sieges, earthquakes and pandemics
Discover a unique landscape shaped by people and nature
See the evidence of Sandwich's former role as a coastal port

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks



Dedicated to the late Keith A Wells
Chairman of The Sandwich Society
whose knowledge and enthusiam was invaluable in creating this walk
and whose efforts did so much to support the town



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Cover image: Sandwich Weavers building by Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

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Discover why Sandwich is England's best-preserved medieval town

Sandwich in East Kent is one of England's most picturesque towns. Visitors can explore winding streets lined with timber-framed buildings. Yet behind the charming sights is a fascinating story. Sandwich has survived sieges, earthquakes, pandemics and the loss of a major port.

Medieval Sandwich was a prestigious and prosperous port beside a major shipping channel. The town welcomed pilgrims, launched armies of soldiers and hosted generations of royalty.

By the sixteenth century however Sandwich port was cut off from the coast. The town was left behind, almost frozen in time.



The Admiral Owen pub and The Barbican
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



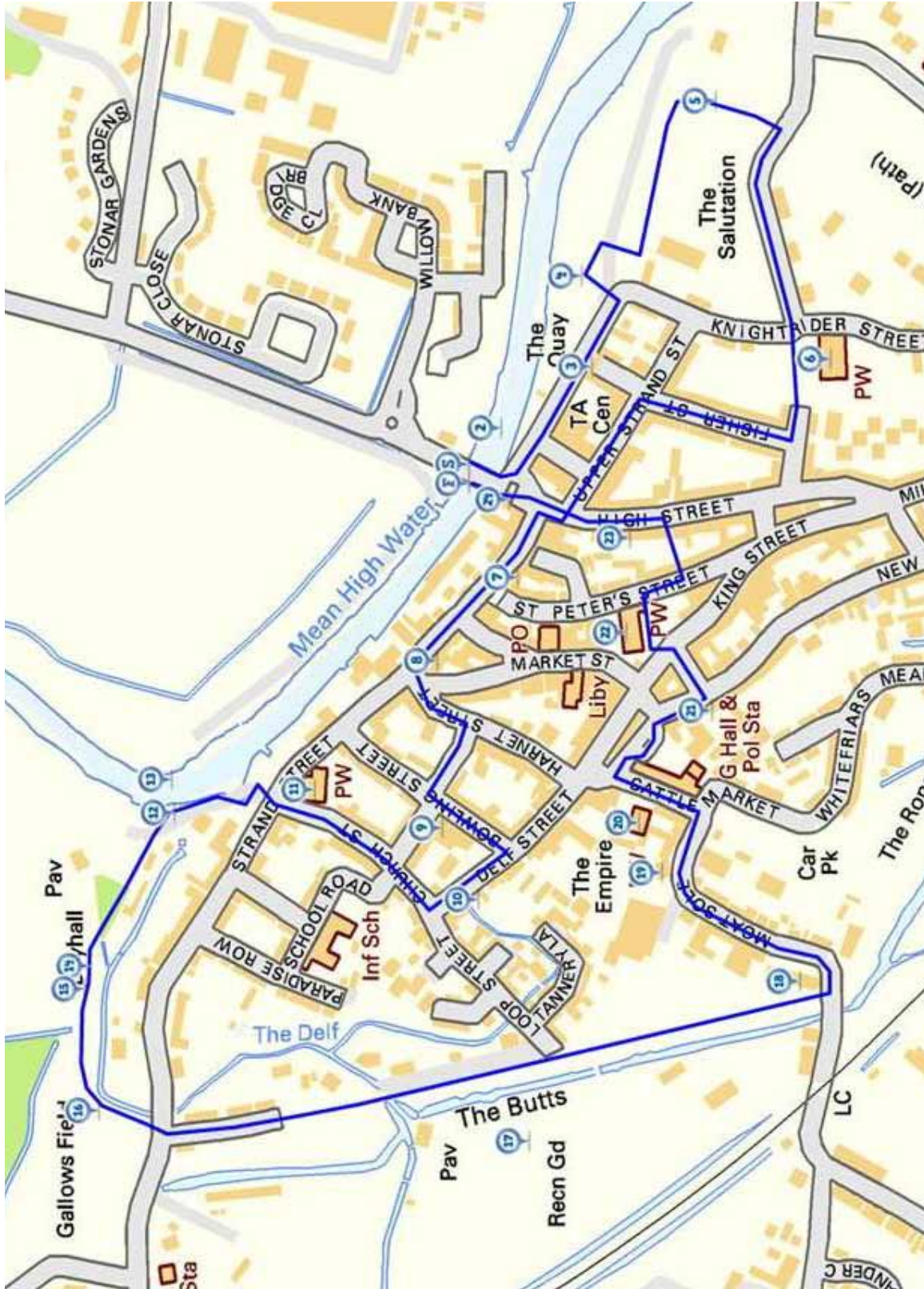
Sandwich Folk Festival in full swing
© Open Sandwich

Using the latest research, this walk explores how this process happened and how Sandwich survived and adapted.

Follow Sandwich's changing fortunes over the centuries. See how different elements shaped the landscape. Find out about the people who lived, worked and visited here - from a famous martyr to the man who named the United States of America.

Also discover how modern Sandwich faces new challenges from an ever-changing environment.

Route overview

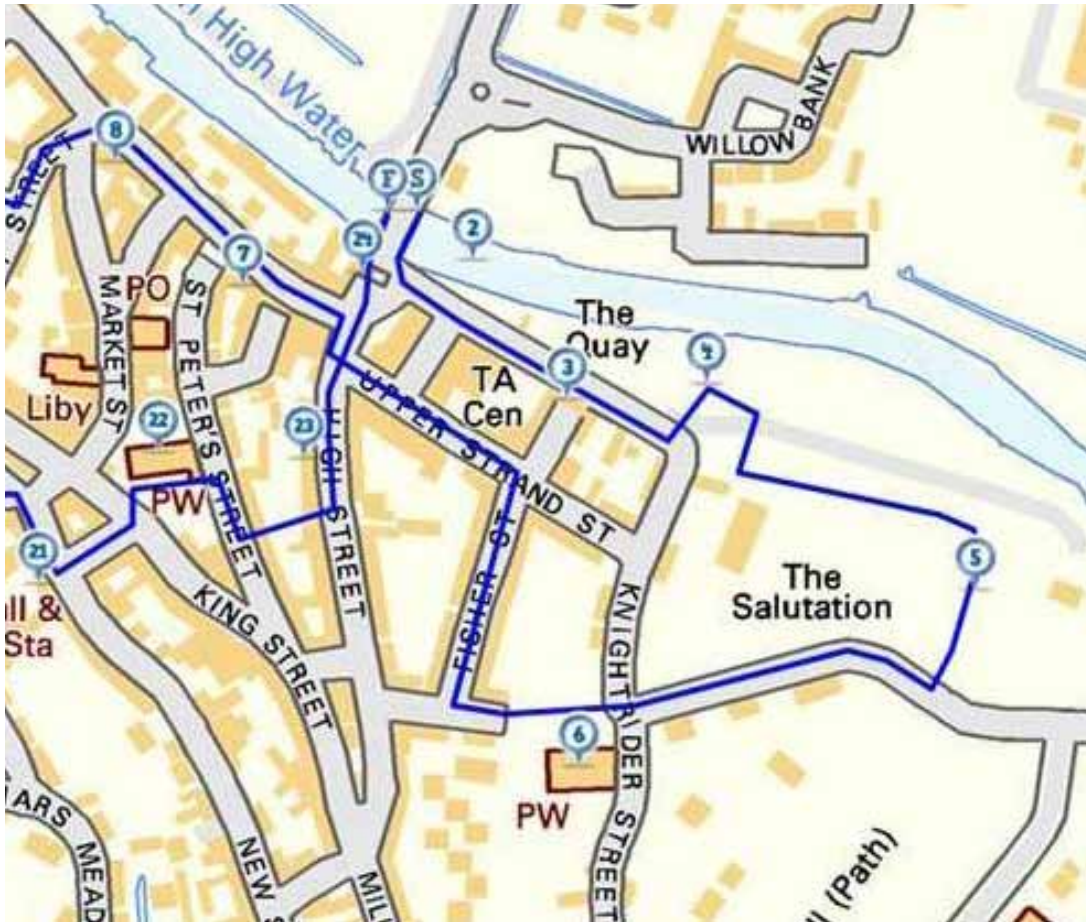


Practical information

Location	Sandwich, Kent, Southeast England
Getting there	<p>Train - Direct services run from Ashford International, Dover, Ramsgate and Folkestone. Some direct services from London (Charing Cross, Waterloo East, London Bridge, St Pancras).</p> <p>Bus - Local and regional services run to Canterbury, Ramsgate, Dover and Deal. Most routes stop by the Guildhall.</p> <p>Car - Access via the A256 between Dover and Thanet or the A257 from Canterbury. Limited parking at The Quay, Cattle Market and Gazen Salts (charges apply).</p> <p>Bicycle - Sandwich is on National Cycle Route Number 1 (Canterbury to Dover)</p>
Start & finish point	Sandwich Town Bridge, Ramsgate Road, CT13 9EA
Distance	2 miles
Directions from railway station to start	<p>From the station turn left and follow the path beside the railway line. Turn right at the road (New Street). Continue along New Street then take the first right (Galliard Street). At the end, cross over and bear left into The Chain.</p> <p>Take the first right (Church Street St Clement's) then turn left into Fisher Street. At the end continue ahead onto the cobbled street and go through the stone archway. Turn left at the quayside. The river and the town bridge will be on your right.</p>
Level	Moderate – A relatively easy stroll around the town; some narrow streets, minor ascents and descents
Conditions	Many narrow pavements so watch your footing. A short section is on open land and can be muddy after rain. Take care of children by the river and ditches.

Suitable for	<p>Families – Plenty of stories and sights for all ages</p> <p>Wheelchairs / Pushchairs – Some slopes and narrow pavements</p> <p>Dogs - Keep on a lead; not allowed in Gazen Salts Nature Reserve</p>
Refreshments	Plenty of cafés and shops in the town, especially on Strand Street and around the Guildhall. Tea Room at The Salutation (by Stop 5).
Toilets	<p>The Quay, by Fisher Gate (Stop 3) 20p charge</p> <p>In the supermarket after The Butts (Stop 17)</p> <p>Moat Sole, opposite the Red Cow Inn (Stop 19)</p>
Places to visit	<p>Sandwich Guildhall Museum is open April to November. Closed Mondays and lunchtimes (12.30-2pm). Nominal entry fees.</p> <p>The Secret Gardens are open daily from 10am. Closing time varies seasonally. Entry £6.50 adults, £3 children, £16 families. Tel: 01304 619 919</p> <p>Gazen Salts Nature Reserve is open all year round. Free entry, no dogs allowed.</p> <p>Richborough Roman Fort (2 miles from Sandwich) is maintained by English Heritage. Museum open daily from 10am. Closing time varies seasonally. Entry £5 adults, £3 children, £13 families. Tel: 01304 612 013</p>
Other info	Sandwich hosts many festivals throughout the year, often linked to the history of the town. They include The Sandwich Celebration food festival (May), Le Weekend French festival (June), Sandwich Medieval Fayre (June) and Sandwich Folk Festival (July). All lead up to the Sandwich Festival (August Bank Holiday).
Tourist information	Visitor Information Centre inside The Guildhall (next to Stop 20). Cattle Market, CT13 9AH. Tel: 01304 613 565

Start and end of the route



Stopping points

- S.** Sandwich Town Bridge, Ramsgate Road
- 2.** View of the River Stour and The Quay from the bridge
- 3.** The Fisher Gate, The Quay
- 4.** Sandwich Millennium beacon
- 5.** The Bulwark
- 6.** St Clement's Church, Church Street St Clement's
- 7.** Sandwich Weavers, 15 Strand Street
- 8.** The Pilgrims, 39 and 41 Strand Street

- 21.** Thomas Paine's Cottage, 20 New Street
- 22.** St Peter's Church, Market Street
- 23.** Pellicane House, 22 High Street
- 24.** The Barbican / Davis Gate
- F.** Sandwich Town Bridge, Ramsgate Road

1. Welcome to Sandwich

Sandwich Town Bridge, Ramsgate Road

Welcome to Sandwich! This picturesque spot in East Kent is one of England's best-preserved medieval towns. Today its ancient narrow streets and colourful timber-framed buildings make it a medieval jewel in Britain's landscape.

Hundreds of years ago Sandwich was a prosperous port located on a major shipping channel. That all changed in the sixteenth century. When the port declined Sandwich town was left almost frozen in time. This walk explores how and why this process happened.

We will find out how the changing physical environment affected the town and its people. We will hear about Sandwich's medieval importance as a trading point and defensive location. Discover why the town welcomed monarchs and migrants, martyrs and pilgrims and perhaps even an elephant!

This walk was created by Raymond Molony, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. The route is a figure of eight about two miles long. We start and finish at the bridge on The Quay. Most of the route is in the medieval town. There are a few slopes and some very narrow pavements. Please take care of traffic especially at the quayside. A short section of the route is across open land which can be muddy so wear suitable shoes. We hope you enjoy the walk!



Scenes from Sandwich
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 1

Begin the walk halfway across the Town Bridge on the side facing the Bell Hotel and riverside buildings. Look across the river to the car park and quayside.

2. A sandy place

View of the River Stour & The Quay from the bridge

From this bridge we have an excellent view of Sandwich and we can start to understand its layout. The river below is the Stour and the buildings to the right mark the edge of the town on an area of high ground known as the Thanet Beds.

If you look at a map of Kent you will see that the towns of Margate and Ramsgate are in an area called the Isle of Thanet. As the name suggests Thanet was once an island. It was separated from mainland Kent by a strait called the Wantsum Channel. This 600-metre-wide channel was a major shipping route connecting the English Channel with the Thames Estuary.



Sandwich Quay from the bridge
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Sandwich's location during the Saxon period
© Sandwich Guildhall Archive

Sandwich was once located on a sand bank south of the Isle of Thanet where the River Stour flowed into the Wantsum Channel. This location is thought to be the origin of the town's name: 'Sandwich' derives from the Saxon for 'sandy place'. In the tenth century the town relocated to the higher ground where it stands today.

The direction of the prevailing winds along the Wantsum Channel made Sandwich a natural place for ships to shelter. When a port developed here it became known as the Sandwich Haven.

Medieval Sandwich was in an ideal position to prosper from seafaring visitors. Sandwich traded extensively with the rest of England and the Continent. By the eleventh century the town was England's fourth-largest port.

Directions 2

Cross over the bridge towards the Bell Hotel. Turn left then carefully cross over the road. Follow the pavement beside the quayside buildings. Stop when you reach a stone archway next to a white building.

3. Fishy tales

The Fisher Gate, The Quay

This stone archway is known as the Fisher Gate. Sandwich was once a walled town with access through a series of gates like this one. Now only two survive. There has been a fortified gatehouse on this site since 1380 though the current structure dates from 1581 when it was enlarged.

The Fisher Gate was the main gateway from the town to Sandwich quay. The town's merchants walked through the Fisher Gate to conduct business on the quayside.

The medieval quay would have been a busy place lined with ships and bustling with people. Tradesmen like coopers would have used this gate on a daily basis. Coopers were skilled craftsmen who made barrels, a vital trade in a medieval port. Barrels were the best way of transporting goods by sea including wine, beer, spices and salted fish.

Goods would have made their way through this gate as well. For example pack horses carried sacks of raw Kentish wool through here to be shipped to Flanders. Imported goods were taken through the Fisher Gate too. Wine from France, fruit from across Europe, timber from the Baltic were unloaded at The Quay and carried through here into the town.

To protect the town's trade the Fisher Gate had a portcullis which could be lowered to seal off the street behind. You can still see the groove in the archway. Next to the Fisher Gate is a building called The Keep. A chain across the river was located here. This chain allowed town authorities to collect taxes from ships entering and leaving the port.



The Fisher Gate
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 3

From the Fisher Gate continue along The Quay. Cross over the road then turn left before the entrance to the Secret Garden. Head towards the river and stop by the beacon with a large coat of arms on it.

4. A privileged port

Sandwich Millennium Beacon

This beacon was built to mark the Millennium. It also marks the former entrance to Sandwich port. During the town's medieval heyday the River Stour was much wider and covered part of the grassy area we are now on.

Notice the coat of arms on the beacon. The red and blue shield is the emblem of the Cinque Ports. Formed around 1050, the original Cinque Ports were Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich ('cinque' is the French for 'five'). These ports on England's south coast played a special role in medieval England.

England did not have a Navy until the reign of Henry the VII. Before then the Cinque Ports provided the king with men and ships for fifteen days each year and during times of war. In return these ports got special royal privileges such as tax exemptions, salvage rights and their own law courts. Later on this walk we will pass the Guildhall, where the Cinque Port court sessions were held. Look out for other examples of the Cinque Ports emblem around the town.



Sandwich Millennium Beacon and the emblem of the Cinque Ports
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The Cinque Port towns became very wealthy because of their privileges. However, this wealth meant that they became strategic targets and were frequently attacked by French raiders. These attacks escalated between the 1330s and the 1450s, the period of the Hundred Years War between England and France.

Look across the grassy area and you should spot a ditch beside the stone wall. These features were part of Sandwich's defences and we will find out more about these at the next stop.

Directions 4

From the beacon head away from the river and cross the grassy area towards the stone wall. When you reach the wall turn left. Follow the path, keeping the wall and fence on your right. At the playground the path bears right and climbs uphill lined with railings. Continue on this path until you reach a bench and noticeboard. You should be overlooking a ditch and tennis courts. Stop at the bench.

5. Walls and wars

The Bulwark

We are now at the remains of a defensive structure called The Bulwark. This was a large two-storey building completed in 1451 to protect Sandwich harbour. As we have already discovered, the Wantsum Channel made Sandwich accessible but vulnerable. Attacking forces could sail right into Sandwich Haven and plunder the town.

From the thirteenth century Sandwich was attacked several times by the French. King Richard II was so worried about Sandwich that in 1385 he ordered extra walls to be built around parts of the town.

Stone was costly to transport so most of these walls were earthen ramparts topped by wooden palisades. These raised earthworks still survive today and you can follow long stretches of them around the town.

Notice how high up we are compared to the quayside. This site allowed men inside The Bulwark to spot potential enemies sailing up the river. They could fire arrows and cannon at the approaching raiders while the chain across the river that we heard about earlier provided extra security.



Artist impression of the Sandown Gate c.1451
© Sandwich Guildhall Archive



The Bulwark sign at the town wall
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Remains of The Bulwark at the bottom of the ditch
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Despite these defences attacks still occurred. In 1457 a violent raid breached The Bulwark and a 4,000 strong French force sacked the town. Many buildings were destroyed and the mayor was killed. To this day the Mayor of Sandwich wears a black robe in mourning.

All that remains of The Bulwark is this raised bank and a few stone sections at the bottom of the ditch. Today the ditch and other surviving defences protect the town against flooding rather than the French.

The land where The Bulwark stood is now occupied by The Salutation. This impressive house was built in 1912. It was designed by the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens with gardens by Gertrude Jekyll. The Salutation is now a luxury hotel so you cannot go inside unless you are a guest. The gardens however are open to the public and the tea room is worth a visit.



The Salutation

© David Nicholls, Flickr (Creative Commons License)



The Mayor of Sandwich still wears black robes

© Open Sandwich

Directions 5

Continue along the path of The Bulwark up to the road bridge. This was the site of Sandown Gate, another of the town's medieval entrances. Recent research indicates that a royal castle may have existed nearby in the medieval period opposite the Mill Bank. Turn right into Sandown Road and continue until you reach a church on the left. Cross the road and go into the church grounds beside the Knight rider Street sign.

6. Towering presence

St Clement's Church, Church Street St Clement's

This is Sandwich's parish church, St Clement's. It dates from the twelfth century and was built using stone imported from Caen in France. The building boasts Saxon and Norman features including the impressive Norman tower. This tower was a navigation landmark for ships and served as a lookout point in the town's defences.



The area around St Clement's was the core of the medieval town, although medieval Sandwich had three parish churches. These churches are another clue to Sandwich's former prosperity.

St Clement's Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Henry II and Thomas Becket in dispute
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons Licence)

From the tenth century Sandwich belonged to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury. The monks were major local employers and very good landlords charging reasonable rents. These rents were supplemented by taxes. In the medieval era taxes were paid to both the Church and Crown. The monks of Sandwich collected a large amount from tenants, fishermen and visiting ships.

Another reason churches flourished in Sandwich was a constant stream of pilgrims travelling through the town. In 1170 Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, landed in Sandwich after meeting King Henry II in France. Becket then journeyed to Canterbury Cathedral where he was murdered.

After his death Becket was canonised as a saint. A shrine was created in Canterbury Cathedral at the spot where he was killed. Pilgrims from throughout Europe arrived in Sandwich to follow in Becket's footsteps and journey to his shrine.

Directions 6

Keep the church on your left and follow the path through a set of metal gates. Follow the road ahead then turn right into Fisher Street. At the end note the slope down to the back of the Fisher Gate. Also note the Old Custom House to the right. Turn left into Upper Strand Street. Pass Pondicherry Alley, the narrow passage that runs down to The Quay. At the end turn right and then immediately left past The Admiral Owen pub. Continue on the left hand side of Strand Street. Stop outside a building with a sign for Sandwich Weavers.

7. Weaving strands

Sandwich Weavers building, 15 Strand Street

We are now in one of the oldest parts of Sandwich. Here in Strand Street we can still see evidence of the original Saxon street plan. Many streets in this part of the town are narrow passages barely ten feet across. These streets would have bustled with the noise of people, pack animals and barrels being trundled along the quaysides.

Notice how on some buildings the upper stories jut out over the pavements. The Sandwich Weavers is a fine example. These jettied designs allowed traders to maximise their floor space in a restricted site.



Timber-framed buildings in Strand Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Potter Street, one of the narrow Saxon passages
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

In the thirteenth century buildings like this one would have been at the edge of the river. The clue is in the street name. 'Strand' was an Old English word for 'bank' or 'shore'. The buildings on the other side of the street were made after the River Stour shrank and the land was redeveloped.

The Sandwich Weavers building is named after Dutch migrants who settled here in the sixteenth century, although the building itself is much older. When Sandwich was at the height of its prosperity, this building was the part of The Bull Inn. Merchants, sailors and townspeople who met here would have been able to glimpse ships in the river – such as the 200 cargoes of grain that left the quay in 1305 or the large Genoese vessels that were finding it more difficult to use the Wantsum Channel.

Directions 7

Continue along Strand Street and cross over narrow Potter Street. As the road curves to the left, stop outside the large timber-framed building opposite the boatyard.

8. Timber!

The Pilgrims, 39 and 41 Strand Street

You have probably already noticed the large number of timber-framed buildings in Sandwich. In fact Strand Street is considered the longest unbroken stretch of timber-framed buildings in England. This towering building is actually two houses - Harfleet House and Dragon Hall - often known collectively as 'The Pilgrims'

Harfleet House was probably built for a thirteenth-century merchant. Over time its wealthy owners modified the building to three storeys. In 1660 it belonged to major wool merchant, William Harfleet. After wool exports were banned in the late seventeenth century a smugglers' hide was built in the house. The building has been used for many types of business since including a bank, antique shop, hotel, tea room and pub.

Wooden-framed buildings like 'The Pilgrims' were made from a mixture of materials. The outside frames were built using Wealden timbers but internal walls and floors were often made from hardwood imported from the Baltic.



The three-storey facade of Harfleet House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

External walls were made from a mixture of locally-sourced mud, wattle and even dung. These buildings were strong but susceptible to thieves who could force a way through the wall panels. This method became enshrined in law as 'breaking and entering', a phrase still widely used today for burglary.

Before we move on notice the street sign across the road – Breezy Corner. Linger here and you might feel a rush of 'Sandwich wind'. This local feature is caused by the town's location on an area of higher ground near the coast.

Directions 8

Continue along Strand Street to the end of Harnet Street. Carefully cross over then turn left to continue along the right hand side of Harnet Street. Turn right into Guildcount Lane. When you reach the end turn left into Bowling Street. Look across the road at the large house with window shutters on the corner of Vicarage Lane.

9. Strangers in town

Richborough House, 7 Bowling Street

At the Sandwich Weavers building we heard about the Dutch migrants who settled in the town. We have now arrived in the area where this community flourished.

In the sixteenth century the Netherlands were ruled by Spanish Catholics so many Dutch Protestants fled their homeland to escape religious persecution. In 1560 Queen Elizabeth I granted a licence for a group of them to live in Sandwich. Around 25 families moved into this part of the town. They were known locally as 'the Strangers' (a corruption of 'étrangers', the French for 'foreigners').

These Dutch Protestants arrived at just the right time. By the 1560s Sandwich's economy had begun to struggle. Changes to the coastline meant that the port had begun to shrink but Sandwich still had some trade with the Continent so the Dutch able to use their contacts and expertise to make a living.



Richborough House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Weavers used local raw wool to make broadcloth, a luxury item with significant value. The Dutch were also experts at land drainage and market gardening – skills that they are still famous for today. They introduced new crops such as celery and carrots on the sandy soils to the east of the town.

The Dutch gave Sandwich's economy a boost and some became wealthy themselves. A good illustration is the building on the corner, Richborough House. It was built in 1590 for one of the Dutch settlers. Notice the panelled Dutch brick pattern above the door. Also look at the end wall covered in types of expensive stone. These are indications this was a wealthy person's home.

By 1590 the Dutch made up nearly half of the local population. Many houses in the town were modified with features like gable walls and ornate brickwork. As we continue see how many examples you can spot.

Directions 9

Continue along Bowling Street. At the end carefully cross the road and turn right into Delf Street. Continue up to Horse Pond Sluice, a small L-shaped area of water outside a grey house.

10. Water, water, everywhere...

Horse Pond Sluice, Delf Street

This water is Horse Pond Sluice, named after the small metal sluice by the doorway of the house. Sluices are gates used to control water levels especially in streams and canals. The sluice here helps the flow of a waterway called the Delf.



The Delf flows into Sandwich from a series of springs in the Lydden Valley behind the town of Deal. Some sections are underground now but there are stretches, such as the L-shaped section here, that are open at street level.

The name 'Delf' sounds Dutch but it is actually from Old English for 'ditch' or 'dig'. The Delf is not a natural stream; it was diverted by locals in the twelfth century. The water for this innovative system came from marshland outside the town walls.



The Delf was intended to supply the town with clean water but, despite strict laws to maintain it, the results were mixed. Animals got into the water, while beyond Horse Pond Sluice blacksmiths, butchers and tanners used the Delf for their work. The stream was also used to dispose of all kinds of waste.

The Delf waterway at Horse Pond Sluice (top) and alongside New Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

As a result waterborne diseases were a constant problem in Sandwich. Even so the Delf was used for drinking water until the end of the nineteenth century.

Directions 10

Continue along Delf Street then turn right into Church Street (signposted Church Street St Marys). Take time to admire some of the houses. At the end of the road is a church on the right hand side. Stop when you have a good view of the church.

11. Earthquake!

St Mary's Church, Church Street St Mary's

We have now arrived at St Mary's, Sandwich's oldest church. It is thought to date from the eleventh century but was rebuilt several times after damage by French raids. Notice that St Mary's doesn't have a tower. This is because in 1580 "A great and terrible earthquake struck Sandwich which did shake and cleave St Mary's Church". The quake weakened the building's structure and in 1667 the tower collapsed.

Beyond Sandwich the Dover Straits Earthquake of 1580 shook the whole Kent coast, London and parts of Europe. There was a landslide at the White Cliffs of Dover and buildings were damaged in Lille and Ghent. In the English Channel 165 ships sank with much loss of life.

In Sandwich, St Mary's resounded with a loud crack. However damage to the rest of the town was surprisingly light: the many wooden buildings were more flexible and therefore more earthquake-resilient than the few stone ones.



Signs of earthquake damage?
The rebuilt walls of St Mary's Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The now-towerless St Mary's Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Though large earthquakes are unusual in Britain, the area around Sandwich has been struck more than once. Records from May 1382 say that up to 30 ships sank in the English Channel following a quake. Earthquakes hit the Dover Straits again in 1776 and 1950. This has led to the suggestion that a major tremor could occur here every 200 years.

Nearby Folkestone was the centre of two smaller earthquakes in 2007 and 2009. The tectonic activity in East Kent is another example of how Sandwich has been shaped by physical forces over the centuries.

Directions 11

Pass the church taking care as there is no pavement on the right hand side of the road. Carefully cross over Strand Street and head towards the car park using the paths marked for pedestrians. Stop by the wooden gate overlooking the river.

12. Royal river

Banks of the River Stour by Gazan Salts Car Park

Today the River Stour is popular with pleasure boaters. Look out for the Sandwich River Bus, a ferry that runs between Sandwich and Richborough Roman Fort. There has been a ferry on the Stour for almost a thousand years, since King Canute granted the monks of Christ Church a charter to operate one in 1023.

The ferry and the river have many other royal connections too. The river banks we can see were once lined with quays. Monarchs from Henry II to Elizabeth I used these quays en route between England and the Continent.



Pleasure boats on the River Stour
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Henry V, for example, set sail from Sandwich in 1415 for the Battle of Agincourt. His army would have included local archers and ships supplied by the Cinque Ports. Heavier goods such as horses were loaded by a riverside crane.



Henry III's elephant depicted by chronicler Matthew Paris in his 13th century manuscript 'Chronica Majorica'
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

As well as the king's horses it is possible that a more unusual animal may have travelled through Sandwich. In 1255 the French king, Louis IX, sent King Henry III a present – a ten year old African elephant. It was the first elephant to arrive in England since Roman times.

On February 9th Henry ordered the High Sherriff of Kent to bring the elephant from Wissant to London by water. The Wantsum Channel was the main shipping route between France and London so it was possibly taken through Sandwich port. The Sheriff submitted a bill of £6 and 87 pence for transport charges. Expensive indeed when a Knight at Arms could live on £15 a year.

Directions 12

Stay beside the River Stour and look along the river towards the bridge where the walk began.

13. Deposition and drainage

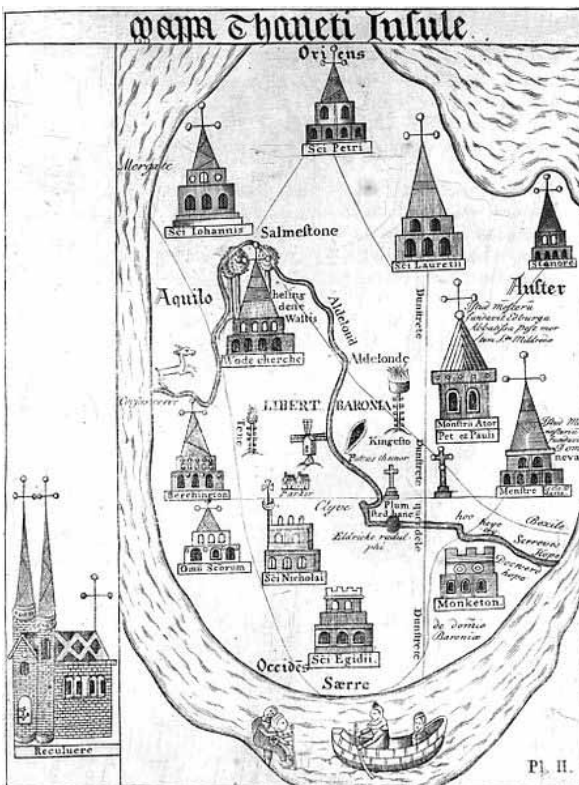
View of the River Stour from Gazen Salts Car Park

We are now at the halfway point on our walk and from here we can look back at the bridge where we started. This view along the river also shows how much the Stour has shrunk since Sandwich's medieval prime. In the 1400s almost 100 local ships were based here and the river welcomed many visiting vessels. So what happened to them and why is today's river so small?

The fate of Sandwich is inextricably linked to its geography. Earlier we learned how Sandwich was founded on a sandbank where the River Stour flowed into the Wantsum Channel. This location created but then destroyed the port. The process happened when two changes in the physical landscape combined.



Thanet ('Toliatis') shown as an island off mainland Kent
Detail from the 'Prima Europa Tabula', an atlas based on maps by Claudius Ptolemy (87-150 AD)
From the Collection of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)



A 15th century map showing Thanet as still an island
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)



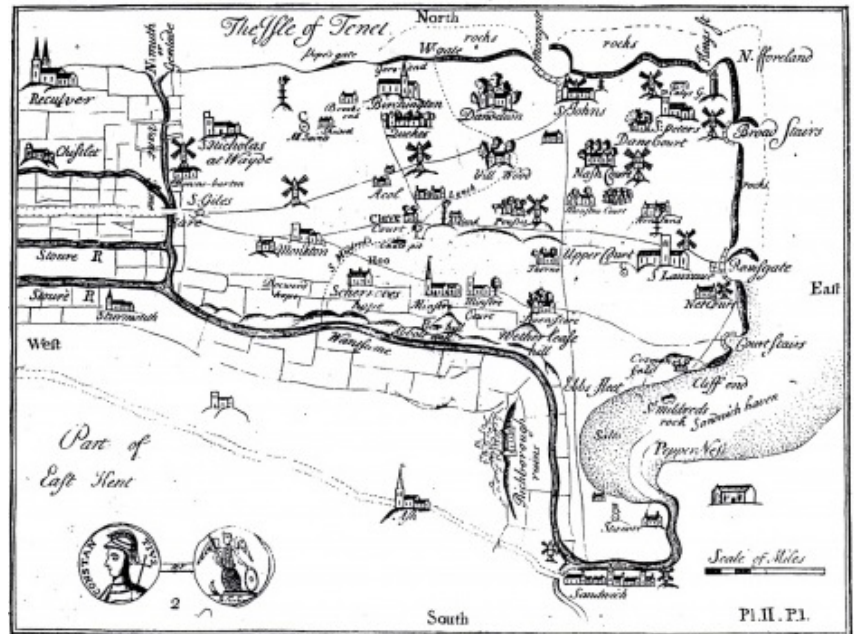
John Speed's map of Kent (1610) shows Sandwich (bottom right) at the mouth of a much narrower Wantsum Channel
From the Collection of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The first change was a natural process. The prevailing winds and tides that carried vessels into Sandwich also moved sediment along the Kent coast from south to north. This sediment was deposited across the mouth of the Wantsum Channel. This gradually reduced access to Sandwich Haven. The process also ultimately stopped the Isle of Thanet being an island.

The second change was caused by human activity. Beside the Wantsum Channel were extensive salt marshes. The medieval monks drained these marshes to use the land for farming. This considerably reduced the width of the Channel making it more difficult for vessels to reach Sandwich port.

By the end of the sixteenth century Sandwich port and its trade had shrunk dramatically because of coastal deposition and marsh drainage. The last recorded ship to use the Wantsum Channel was in 1672 when a vessel from London delivered a set of bells for St Clement's Church.

Look at an Ordnance Survey map of East Kent and you can see a swathe of drainage channels where the Wantsum Channel used to be.



A map from 'The History and Antiquities, as Well as Ecclesiastical as Civil, of the Isle of Thanet, in Kent' by John Lewis (1736)
Sandwich is bottom right; the Wantsum Channel has all but silted up
Reproduced by kind permission of Angela Searles (www.acatholicland.org)



An equivalent Ordnance Survey map of East Kent; the blue lines are drainage channels that indicate the Wantsum Channel's former route.
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Directions 13

Turn away from the river and head towards the former brewery buildings to the left of the car park. Go through the gates marked 'pedestrian access only' and follow the path through the trees. After a short distance there is a playing field on the right. Look over the playing field.

14. Salt and water

Playing fields, Gazen Salts Recreation Ground

Look across the field and see how flat this land is. This is one of the areas reclaimed from the salt marshes we heard about at the last stop. Besides creating farmland draining the marshes released a useful by-product: salt. In the era before refrigerators, salt was a very important way to preserve food. In Sandwich a staple of the local diet was fish which could perish very quickly if left unsalted.

Salt marshes also play an important role in flood protection. They absorb sea water and protect land in times of high tide or storms. The playing fields here can soak up water during flooding of the River Stour or after excessive rain. Notice that there is little housing here. This is to keep a natural barrier that protects the reclaimed land beyond the marshes from flooding.

Flooding is still a risk, however, in Sandwich. The Environment Agency estimates that 488 homes could be affected by flooding. In fact when we created this walk new flood defences costing £21.7 million were being built along the banks of the Stour including higher walls and spillways. In the meantime, a number of mobile flood barriers have been purchased for emergency use. Changes in the natural environment are still affecting Sandwich, just as they have for thousands of years.



Flat marshland at Gazen Salts before the reserve developed
© Gazen Salts Nature Reserve



Mobile flood barriers along Sandwich quay
© Fluvial Innovations

Directions 14

Remain facing the playing fields and look towards the complex of pale modern buildings on the horizon.

15. Secrets and discoveries

View of Discovery Park

This landscape hides several interesting secrets and discoveries.

The pale modern buildings on the horizon are part of Discovery Park. The Park opened in 1957 as a research and development facility for the pharmaceutical company Pfizer. Many new drugs were developed here to treat various illnesses and diseases.

The site became the town's largest employer but after the downturn in the global economy in 2008, Pfizer reduced their operations. There are now plans to use the buildings as a science park.

Before Discovery Park was built this low-lying area was ideal for a secret military base. In 1916 a secret port called Richborough was created here, named after a nearby Roman fortress. This port supplied the British Army with food and ammunition during the First World War. The Richborough port was also where roll on / roll off ocean ferries were first developed. Originally used to transport ammunition, supplies and tanks, their design revolutionised transport logistics in the twentieth century.



Part of the Discovery Park complex
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The train ferry at Richborough Port
© Sandwich Guildhall Archive



The former Kimbers Golden Crust Bakery on Harnet Street
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

In 1939 part of the disused port - the Kitchener Camp - accommodated 5,000 European Jewish men escaping Nazi persecution. Sandwich welcomed their arrival. Local coal merchants and builders benefited by helping to rebuild the camp. Meanwhile, Kimbers Golden Crust Bakery on Harnet Street started to sell real coffee in response to these new European customers. A touch of Viennese coffee house culture transplanted to East Kent!

The dense group of trees to the left of Discovery Park is part of the Gazen Salts Nature Reserve. This area of protected land has become a haven for wildlife including orange tip butterflies, tufted ducks, teals, cuckoos, woodpeckers, warblers, kingfishers and endangered water voles. The reserve, the secret base and Discovery Park are all examples of land use adapting to a changing environment.



Gazen Salts has become a wildlife haven to many species.
Clockwise from top left: kingfisher, orange tip butterfly, water vole, reed warbler
Wikimedia Commons / water vole © Peter Trimming, Geograph (Creative Commons License)

Directions 15

Continue along the path as it sweeps to the left. Pass the entrance gate of the Gazen Salts Nature Reserve on the right. A fence will appear on your right and a stream on your left. Stop when you reach a concrete bunker on your left.

16. A place of punishment

Gallows Field

We are now in an area outside Sandwich's medieval walls. The path we are on led to the Canterbury Gate which was the main entrance into the town from the west.

Being outside the town walls this area was used for less desirable activities. The land on the other side of the fence is known as Gallows Field. As the name indicates this was where the town gallows were located. Robbers were hanged and their bodies displayed to deter other criminals from entering the town. Meanwhile women accused of crimes were ducked in stagnant water.



Gallows Field

Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The pillbox beside the Guestling

Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Note the water ditch beside the path. This is the Guestling, a stream that flows from the Delf we saw earlier. Waterways like the Guestling were originally created by monks to drain the land. After the French raid of 1457 many of them were deepened and used as an additional defence feature.

Across the ditch is a concrete bunker built during the Second World War. This is a Type 22 pillbox and was used as part of the south coast defences against Nazi invasion in 1940. The ditch and the pillbox show how Sandwich was on the frontline of England's defences for over 500 years.

Directions 16

Continue along the path until you reach a road. Cross the road carefully and enter the lane to the left of Guestling Cottage. Pass the houses on the left and continue onto a raised path lined with trees. Pass through a pair of metal gate posts. A stream and cricket pavilion will appear on the right. Stop at one of the benches by the path and look at the flat land beyond the stream.

17. Bows and bats

View of Sandwich Town Cricket Club, The Butts



Left: a 15th century miniature of the Battle of Agincourt. Right: the site where Henry V's archers are thought to have trained
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License) / Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

We are now on top of the old town walls again. Like The Bulwark these walls were originally made of earth with wooden palisades on top. This pleasant stretch is called The Butts. The unusual name comes from an activity that used to take place on the drained marshland now occupied by Sandwich Town Cricket Club.

As we have already heard, during much of Sandwich's medieval prosperity England was at war with France. English monarchs demanded that their subjects should always be ready for war service. For example Henry III issued an edict in 1252 that required all "citizens, burgesses, free tenants, villeins and others from 15 to 60 years of age" to have ready weapons. Games like football were banned in case they distracted men from developing their military skills.

The most effective English weapon in this era was the longbow. From the age of ten every able-bodied man had to learn how to use one. Archers developed their skills by hitting targets – or 'butts' – set at ranges of up to 200 metres. In medieval times the flat land here was where locals and the king's men practiced. It is thought that Henry V's archers trained here before the Battle of Agincourt.

The preferred wood for making longbows was yew. This very strong wood was so popular that English supplies ran out. By around 1350 stocks of this desirable wood had to be imported from Spain and Italy through Sandwich port.

Directions 17

Continue along the path of The Butts. Pass a small bridge on the right and a supermarket car park on the left. At the end of the path turn left. The start of the road (called Moat Sole) was the site of the Woodnesborough Gate, another of Sandwich's medieval entrances. Follow Moat Sole as it sweeps round to the left. Stop almost immediately opposite a large stone building with a porch by the road.

18. Pilgrims' progress

St Thomas' Hospital, Moat Sole

This grand stone building is St Thomas' Hospital. It is not a hospital in the modern medical sense but rather it was founded to accommodate medieval pilgrims. There has been a St Thomas' Hospital in Sandwich since the fourteenth century, though the buildings we can see were completed in 1878. The date on the original porch refers to its earlier location.

The hospital was named after Thomas Becket. As we have already heard, following Becket's martyrdom Sandwich became a popular stop for pilgrims travelling to Canterbury.



St Thomas' Hospital
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral showing pilgrims travelling to Thomas Becket's shrine
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

There were three 'hospitals' in medieval Sandwich; St Thomas', St Bartholemew's and St John's. Each one provided pilgrims with facilities for their journeys. These pilgrims added considerably to Sandwich's wealth by spending money here and paying taxes on their accommodation and travel.

These costs were met as pilgrimage was a serious matter. Pious devotees travelled throughout Europe to go on spiritual as well as physical journeys. For many working people it was also their only chance to leave their lord's manor for an extended period.

We can get an idea who went on these pilgrimages from Geoffrey Chaucer's epic poem, 'The Canterbury Tales'. Written in the 1370s it follows a group of pilgrims travelling to Canterbury from London.



Geoffrey Chaucer shown as a pilgrim in an early manuscript of 'The Canterbury Tales'
 Wikimedia Commons
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The Prologue contains an outline of their journey:

Palmeres for to sēken straunge strondes
 To fernē halwēs, kowthē in sondry londēs;
 And spēcially from evely shires ende
 Of Engeland, to Caunterbury thę wēndē,
 The hooly blisful martir for to sēkē
 That hēm hath holpen, whan that thę wēre sēkē.

Or:

Wandering travellers tread new shores, strange strands
 Seek out far shrines, renowned in many lands,
 And specially from every shire's end
 Of England to Canterbury they wend
 the holy blessed martyr there to seek,
 Who has brought health to them when they were sick.

The pilgrims in 'The Canterbury Tales' are from many classes and occupations. Besides clergy the group includes a knight, a merchant, a yeoman, a sailor, a widow and a miller. Chaucer's characters share stories, arguing and drinking throughout. The suggestion is that pilgrims enjoyed social opportunities as well as spiritual reflections during their travels.



Woodcut from the first edition (1483)
 depicting the company of pilgrims
 Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)

Directions 18

Continue along Moat Sole until you reach a mini roundabout. Use the supermarket crossing point to the left to cross the road. Continue along Moat Sole and stop outside the Red Cow pub.

19. Thirsty work

The Red Cow, 12 Moat Sole

We are now outside The Red Cow. As the name suggests this part of the town has a farming history. Until the 1970s the car park across the road was the site of the town's cattle market. In fact the street around the car park still retains the name Cattle Market today.

Many of the regulars at the Red Cow were animal drovers and farmers. Cattle and sheep were reared on the marshy fields outside the town walls before being herded into the market. Therefore farmers had to breed animals that could live on marshy land. Breeds of North Kent sheep in particular were well adapted to living on these salty soils.



The Red Cow
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Sheep being herded to the market
© Sandwich Guildhall Archive

Sandwich livestock supplied the town plus provided meat to the nearby naval base at Deal. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century sailors and Royal Marines at sea were given one pound of salted meat as part of their daily rations. Fresh meat (if not overcooked) provided sailors with Vitamin C which was essential to combat the onset of scurvy. This fresh meat would be loaded onto naval vessels while they were at anchor off the coast.

At the Red Cow, the drovers and farmers would quench their thirst with beer which was safer to drink than the easily polluted water that flowed along the Delf and other streams around the town.

Directions 19

Continue along Moat Sole. When you reach the car park on the right, turn into the road to the left. Continue a short distance and stop outside the pale building set back from the road.

20. A place of shelter

Sandwich United Reformed Church, Cattle Market

This distinctive building is the Sandwich United Reformed Church. It was built in 1706 behind a coaching inn's outhouse. Do go inside the church if it is open. The two pillars holding up the ceiling are a pair of ships' masts. They come from ships that transported another of Sandwich's migrant communities - French Huguenots.

Like the Dutch weavers the Huguenots were Protestants who arrived in Sandwich to escape religious persecution. From the late sixteenth century an estimated 40,000 Huguenots settled in England. They were the first group of people to be called refugees – the word comes from the French 'refugier' which means 'to take shelter'.



Sandwich United Reformed Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The Guildhall is still used for traditional Cinque Ports ceremonies
© Open Sandwich

In Sandwich the Huguenots found shelter with the local Non-Conformist community. Non-Conformists are Protestants who worship independently from the Church of England. When Sandwich's Non-Conformists began building their church the Huguenot settlers donated the masts as tokens of gratitude.

Before we move on, notice the large building across the road. This is the back of the Guildhall. Built from 1579 the Guildhall was the Cinque Ports courthouse. It is now home to the town museum and is well worth a visit.

Directions 20

Feel free to enter the church if it is open. When you are ready, leave the church and carefully cross the road. Keep the Guildhall on your right and follow the pavement into a market square. Continue across the square and onto the right hand side of New Street. Stop beside a small white house with a square plaque above the door.

21. The great migration

Thomas Paine's Cottage, 20 New Street

We have already heard about people who arrived in Sandwich from abroad. Another part of the town's story is the opposite journey – people who left here for foreign lands. By the 1600s Sandwich had declined as a major trading port but it was still used by smaller ships. In fact Sandwich port's reduced size helped it become one of the departure points of the 'Great Migration'.

The 'Great Migration' was a period of religious turmoil from the 1600s when English Puritans left the country to start new lives overseas. Some 40,000 Puritans settled in America. As Sandwich was by then a small port it was an easier place for people to evade the authorities.



The 'Mayflower II', a replica of the type of ship that took Puritans to America in the early 17th century
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License)



Posthumous portrait of Thomas Paine (c.1880)
Wikimedia Commons
(Creative Commons License)

One example of people leaving Sandwich was the ship 'Hercules' which set sail in February 1634 with 99 people on board. Among them were the merchant William Hatch and the surgeon Comfort Starre who helped establish the town of Scituate in Massachusetts. There is also a town in Massachusetts named Sandwich which was founded by Puritan migrants.

Puritans were not the only people to leave Sandwich for a new life. This small house once belonged to the writer and political activist Thomas Paine. In 1759 he set up a tailor's shop here that specialised in making corsets.

The business was not a success so Paine emigrated in pursuit of a better living, first to France and then America. His writing career there inspired the American Independence movement and he created the phrase 'United States of America'.

You now have the choice whether to take a small diversion and see the Old Dutch House.

This house, at number 62 King Street, is one of the most striking buildings owned by Sandwich's Dutch settlers and is covered in ornate brickwork.

To visit this house simply follow the directions below. To continue the walk, follow Directions 21.



The Old Dutch House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 21

Cross over the road and continue along Austin's Lane. The next stop is the church ahead. When you are ready, bear **left** and go into the church grounds. Stop with a view of the tower.

To visit the Old Dutch House

Cross over the road and continue along Austin's Lane. Turn **right** at the end and continue downhill. Pass Short Street on the left and a garage on the right. The Old Dutch House is the white building on the right hand side.

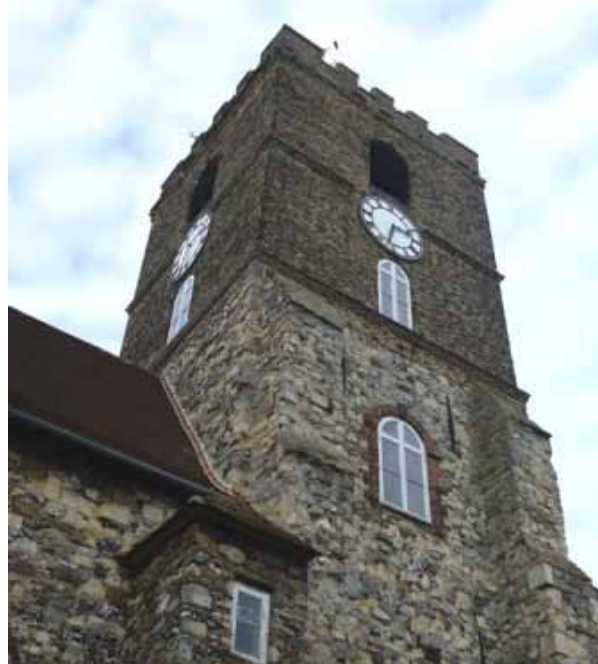
When you are ready, retrace your way back uphill to the church.

22. Protection and plague

St Peter's Church, Market Street

We are now at St Peter's, the third of Sandwich's medieval churches and one that played an important role in the town. Its central location meant that it sounded the curfew bell at eight o'clock each night. All fires in the town had to be extinguished then - a vital precaution when most of the buildings were flammable timber-framed houses.

St Peter's also offered protection during the Plague. The Plague or 'Black Death' was one of the worst pandemics in history. It started in China then swept across Europe in 1348 though outbreaks continued for over 300 years. The disease was spread by fleas which lived on rats. Since rats often hid on ships, plague spread rapidly in port towns. Sandwich was hit by several outbreaks. In 1564 infected people were quarantined inside St Peter's to stop the disease spreading.



The tower of St Peter's Church
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

After this St Peter's became the community church of the town's Dutch settlers who maintained the building. Look carefully at the tower. The top is made from darker brick than the rest. When the original tower collapsed in 1661 the Dutch rebuilt it. They added the unusual dome on the top and the gable wall on the chapel entrance.

The curfew bell tradition continues to this day; from Monday to Saturday the bell rings at 8pm for 10 minutes.

Directions 22

With the church on your left, go through the gap in the wall onto St Peter's Street. Turn right and head toward the white building on the right hand side with the noticeboard on the end wall. This is where the town jail used to be.

Go into the narrow passage across the street called Holy Ghost Alley. This was originally a shortcut that allowed people to carry water from the Delf Stream. Walk through the alley to emerge on the High Street. Turn left and continue a short distance until you are outside a dark building on the left hand side called Pellicane House.

Note: the alley may be too narrow for pushchairs and wheelchairs. For an alternative route turn right from the church and continue along St Peter's Street. Turn left into Short Street then left at the end to enter the High Street.

23. Ups and downs

Pellicane House, 22 High Street

We are now in Sandwich's High Street. Notice the much larger buildings here compared to the streets by the river that we saw earlier. The higher ground here away from the crowded quays allowed people to develop larger properties in this part of the town.

Many were highly modified in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A good example is Pellicane House which features walls covered in flint. Look for other buildings nearby that have been updated including Georgian fronts added by rich owners.

By the sixteenth century the High Street had replaced The Quay as the town's business centre. This shift illustrates Sandwich's decline after its medieval prosperity. When the Wantsum Channel and Sandwich Haven silted up, large ships could no longer travel to the quayside. Trade shifted to the nearby coastal towns of Dover and Deal which could cope with large numbers of naval and merchant vessels.

Furthermore, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries from 1536. This meant that the monks who owned Sandwich had to surrender their land and property to the king. Henry also suppressed religious hospitals and Thomas Becket's shrine was destroyed on his orders.

Once Sandwich lost both its port and its pilgrims it became isolated. The processes that caused the port to decline left the medieval town behind. Sandwich did not grow dramatically thereafter; today the population is 4,500 compared to around 2,000 in the late medieval port. By comparison the population of industrialised towns and cities doubled in decades rather than centuries.



Pellicane House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



The 'Matthew' replica ship in Sandwich (2012); its size shows how Sandwich became unsuitable for large trade vessels
© Open Sandwich

Directions 23

Continue along the High Street. Stop beside The Admiral Owen pub and look at the arch ahead next to The Crispin Inn.

24. A haven again

The Barbican, Ramsgate Road / The Quay

This arch is The Barbican or Davis Gate, another of Sandwich's medieval gates. It was built in the fourteenth century as part of the town's defences. From 1759 until 1977 it was used to collect tolls from travellers crossing the bridge. There is still a board on the inside wall listing the toll charges.

These tolls became a major source of income for the town, especially from the late Victorian era when Sandwich's preserved medieval streets became a visitor attraction. Sandwich railway station opened in 1847 and a new influx of visitors brought a degree of prosperity to the town. The amount of toll money collected funded the rebuilding of the bridge in 1892. Tourism is still one of the main elements of the local economy today.



The Barbican
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Increased visitor numbers also helped protect Sandwich. The Barbican, the town walls, the churches and many of the houses we have seen are now listed buildings. In fact the whole medieval town is a designated conservation area.



The town bridge, rebuilt using funds raised by the tolls
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Toll charges are still listed inside The Barbican
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Another reason visitor numbers increased from the Victorian era onwards was a new leisure activity: golf. Sandwich is home to three world-class golf courses including Royal St George's which opened in 1887. Sandwich has hosted The Open Championship 15 times. Today's pilgrims come to Sandwich to watch the giants of this global game.

Interestingly the golf courses developed thanks to the physical processes that shrank the port. The courses are on coastal land that was created by centuries of sediment deposition. This is yet another example of Sandwich using its changing physical geography for economic gain.



Sandwich's Victorian-era Open winners: JH Taylor (left) in 1894 and Harry Vardon (centre) in 1899
The doorway of The Bell Hotel (right) also records how Sandwich has become a golfing haven
Wikimedia Commons (Creative Commons License) / Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 24

Carefully cross over the end of the High Street towards the Bell Hotel. Then cross over The Quay and bear left towards the town bridge where you started the walk. As before, stop halfway across the bridge.

Note: it is possible to access the bridge through The Barbican. Please take care though as the pavements inside are very narrow and traffic from the High Street goes through the arch. Use the traffic lights to go through safely. As you do, look inside for the toll charge board and a plaque commemorating Richborough Transit Camp.

25. Monks, monarchs and migrants

Sandwich town bridge, Ramsgate Road

We end our walk back at the bridge overlooking The Quay. From here we can see how Sandwich has adapted to changing circumstances.

The river is no longer a place for ships to load and unload but a place for leisure boating. The quayside buildings have changed from warehouses to pubs and restaurants. The Barbican has changed use from a defensive structure to a tourist attraction.

We hope you have enjoyed this walk around Sandwich. The story has shown how geography has always affected the town.



The Bell Hotel and Sandwich Riverbus at The Quay
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Sandwich's favourable location created a sheltered harbour beside a major shipping route. Sandwich reached its economic peak during the early medieval period and the town gained income from its port and passing pilgrims.

However, the natural process of coastal deposition and the deliberate draining of salt marshes changed the landscape. The harbour was cut off from major trade and the economy went into decline from the 1600s despite an influx of skilled migrants from Europe.



Events such as Sandwich Medieval Fayre celebrate the town's heyday and attract new visitors
© Open Sandwich

These physical and economic changes left the town almost frozen in time. Sandwich has since capitalised upon its unrivalled collection of medieval buildings through tourism. The processes that destroyed the port also helped to create new land uses from golf courses to nature reserves.

Geography is never static though and even now Sandwich faces new challenges. For example, climate change poses a flood risk while fluctuations in global markets affect local employers. Sandwich and its people have always adapted to constantly shifting physical and economic environments. Like the medieval monks, monarchs and migrants, today's residents once again face both the threats and possibilities posed by Sandwich's fascinating and changing landscape.



Clockwise from top left: Holy Ghost Alley, the Red Cow sign, Thomas Paine's Cottage, Dragon Hall door knocker
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 25

You may like to explore the town further or follow the town walls. To go to Sandwich railway station, make your way back along the High Street. Continue onto The Chain then bear right into Galliard Street. At the end turn left onto New Street. The station is on the left.

Credits

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