A Secular Pilgrimage
along East Kent’s Royal Saxon Way

A gentle walk of some forty miles over six days along the Royal Saxon Way

The RSW was created as part of the project Pathways to the Past: exploring the legacy of Ethelburga

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# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ 3

THE ‘OFFICIAL’ ROUTE OF THE ROYAL SAXON WAY ........................................................................... 5

OUR ROUTE ALONG THE ROYAL SAXON WAY ............................................................................... 6

DAY 1: FOLKESTONE TO LYMINGE, VIA PADDLESWORTH ............................................................. 7

1 FOLKESTONE TO PADDLESWORTH .................................................................................................. 7
2 PADDLESWORTH TO LYMINGE ..................................................................................................... 12

DAY 2: WINGMORE TO LYMINGE, VIA ELHAM .............................................................................. 16

DAY 3: WINGMORE TO BRIDGE, VIA BARHAM, KINGSTON AND BISHOPSBOURNE .................. 19

1 WINGMORE TO BARHAM ................................................................................................................ 19
2 BARHAM TO BRIDGE, VIA KINGSTON AND BISHOPSBOURNE .................................................. 23

DAY 4: BRIDGE TO LITTLEBOURNE, VIA PATRIXBOURNE AND BEKESBOURNE ....................... 28

DAY 5: LITTLEBOURNE TO THE BLUE BRIDGE, VIA WICKHAMBREAUX AND PRESTON ........ 33

1 LITTLEBOURNE TO WICKHAMBREAUX ...................................................................................... 33
2 PRESTON ........................................................................................................................................... 36

DAY 6: WEST STOURMOUTH TO MINSTER-IN-TANET ..................................................................... 39

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF OUR ROUTE BY CHURCHES, DISTANCES AND TIMINGS ................. 44

APPENDIX 2: PUBLIC TRANSPORT MAP .......................................................................................... 48

APPENDIX 3: SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AT LYMINGE .............................. 49

*Front cover* is a picture of a tree in Bourne Park, displaying remarkable epicormic growth
Back cover is a stile in a field near St Mildred’s Church, Preston-next-Wingham
Introduction
In the spring of 2019, the domestic comrade and I decided that a nice long walk would do us good, and we accordingly decided to take a week off to please ourselves. We took advantage of the newly minted Royal Saxon Way, which winds its very pleasant path from SS Mary and Eanswythe’s church in the middle of old Folkestone to the almost equally ancient foundation of St Mary the Virgin in Minster-in-Thanet on the edge of what a millennium ago was the Wantsum Channel. The weather that first day was not brilliant — the two showers of hail chilled and stung us, and the general dampness was not cheering — but the rest of the week delivered perfect walking conditions. Puddles and mud were very rare indeed, and the sun always shone, tempered by a cool and pleasant breeze.

Note 1: “RSW” refers to the Royal Saxon Way, the creation of Rob and Diana Baldwin (to whom much praise and thanks): (https://geopaethas.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/royal-saxon-way-route-details-compressed.pdf). It uses existing rights of way, of course, and we found the route easy to follow using the RSW route-map, our own OS maps (hard copy and app [see Notes 3-4 below]) and the frequent way-markers on the ground. We deliberately deviated from the route several times for relatively short distances and for various reasons, but we never had any problem finding our way back to the “proper” path.

Note 2: We live in Lyminge and returned to our house at the end of each day. We tried to use public transport as much as possible. The schematic on p48 outlines the routes; for better details (especially for people who don’t live in Lyminge) you can use traveline – http://www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/se/XSLT_TRIP_REQUEST2?language=en&timeOffset=15. We also use the real-time information provided by the UK Bus Checker app, which we have found very reliable. For trains only, there is National Rail Enquiries (https://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search).

Note 3: We have the UK Map App on our iPhones: for a modest initial outlay, this app gives access to the 1:10,000 and 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey (OS) digital maps, which can be downloaded and used off-line. These lack some of the information available on the paper Landranger and Explorer maps (notably some footpaths and all field boundaries, so we usually also have the Explorer map with us), but on this app the OS data is supplemented by volunteer-collected footpath data from OpenStreetMap.org. Using GPS data, it can (if you ask it to) tell you where you are, record where you walk (or drive, fly, swim, etc) and locate on the map the site of waymarks and of your photos.

Note 4: The maps in this diary are screen-shots of the maps created by our UK Map App, our use of which here we are required to acknowledge, and gladly do so: the maps were generated using the UK Map App, which contains (i) OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2019, (ii) OS OpenData which is free to use under the Open Government Licence, and (iii) OpenStreetMap data, which is licensed under the Open Database License v1.0. We hope readers find them as useful as we do, but they are not perfect, and you may want to bear the following in mind:

(a) the direction of the little walking men is fixed left to right, and is thus often not taking the direction in which we were walking
(b) the colour and numbering of the route changes when the tracking is turned off and on again (for example when we have stopped for lunch)
(c) the numbering of the tracks often subsequently changes for reasons we do not understand
(d) the digital OS maps used by the apps are available at various scales (see note 3), and as you zoom in and out one view fades as another takes over. This means that on some of our screen-shots you can see the ghost of the map at a smaller or larger scale which, until you get used to it, can be confusing
(e) the tracking system locates us once a second, and its accuracy is nearly always astonishing. Sometimes however it fails to pinpoint us precisely, and then it can go a bit haywire, placing us up to 50 metres from where we actually are. At such times, the tracking can show us going round in circles. Sometimes we were. Sometimes we were following a zig-zagging path. Sometimes we have fiddled with the app later to produce a smoother line. And sometimes the system had pretty much lost us for a little while.

Note 5: We have no financial interest in any of these apps. We use them and they suit us, and they may suit you!
The ‘Official’ route of the Royal Saxon Way
NB This does not show the Eastern Loop of the RSW, which is where we began our walk.
Our route along the Royal Saxon Way
Day 1: Folkestone to Lyminge, via Paddlesworth

1 Folkestone to Paddlesworth
What we walked on this day was not part of the RSW proper, which for this section directs people to Lyminge via a westward loop through Cheriton and along the Elham Valley Way. Instead, we took the eastward section of the RSW Loop Route.¹ We chose to do this because

(a) we had already walked much of the westward route, but had walked very little of this eastern path;
(b) a rather steep ascent of the Downs is required on both routes, but it looked as though the eastern one would get it out of the way very early on, and that appealed to us;
(c) the eastern route goes via the little church at Paddlesworth, which we had never visited;
and (d) there is no law against straying from the route, and no RSW police to tut at those who do.

We made a leisurely start, catching the 17 bus down to the Folkestone bus-station, which is where our walk really began. It is only a bit over a quarter of a mile from there to the church.

SS Mary and Eanswythe’s was, as it usually is, locked; but we have attended many concerts there in the past, so were not too upset at this refusal. As so often on this walk, although the foundation of the church has strong links with early Saxon Christianity, little survives from that period – indeed this church is largely Victorian.

There have been three churches in this immediate area. The first was associated with the monastery founded in 630 by St Eanswythe (making it very probably the first such in England); the convent (as we would call it, since it was for women) flourished for many years, but was in decline when it was destroyed either by marauding Danes or the marauding sea in or about 867 (accounts differ, but what- or who-ever caused its loss, the site no longer exists). By 1138, the ancient church had also been abandoned to the sea and a new building, associated with the new Folkestone Priory, was dedicated to SS Mary and Eanswythe; additions were made during the following century. Finally, at various points in the nineteenth century, the church was substantially re-built (only a few stones of the Priory remained by that time).

However, in 1885, towards the end of the Victorian restoration, an extraordinary discovery was made: in the chancel, close to the altar and hidden behind thick plaster, was a niche inside which was a small twelfth-century reliquary containing human bones. It is now generally suspected that they are St Eanswythe’s, and the reliquary, close to where it was found 130-odd years ago, is now protected by a brass door and grille. At the very least the bones are of the right date, so the notion that they belong to the saint is far from impossible, and the (very plausible) theory is that her remains had been rescued, first from the original convent in order to be held in the old church, then transferred in or about 1138 to the new church, and then presumably sealed up in 1535, during the first round of Henry VIII’s suppression of the monasteries. If true, this is an extremely unusual survival.

But, as I say, there was no access to the church the day we were there. So we turned our backs to the north door and faced the persistent drizzle to begin the RSW. The “proper” (western) route would have meant turning left outside the church, but we needed to turn right. When we were a little way down The Bayle I looked back, and was rewarded with this charming if damp view (left).

Not for the last time, we forgot to turn on the tracking device on our phones, but we freely confess that we had
already failed to follow the recommended route.
We carried on down The Bayle and crossed The Parade to take the steps down into the Old High Street. Somehow, I had never noticed these steps before, and it was very pleasant to discover them now — as we often did throughout this walk, we both had a strong sense of following an old, old path. Turning right down the steep Old High Street, we crossed Tontine Street, passed under the railway viaduct and then along The Stade.

Despite the cold weather, there were plenty of people kayaking in the sea, and they were being protected from the shore by several emergency workers who looked bored and very cold; in the nicest possible way, they seemed eager to see some action. However no-one obliged by capsizing while we were passing through.

We walked as far as the (very obvious) steps that go up East Cliff — which is where we remembered to turn the tracking on (left; see also Notes 3&4 on pp1-2) and met a young man with a very lively ferret on a lead. We climbed up to the grassy area between Wear Bay Road and the cliff, pausing halfway up to admire the splendid view of the East Cliffs, and to feel relief that the ferret was not going our way — and to catch our breath. (Long before the end of our week, we would be able take climbs of this kind in our stride, but at that point, we were very unfit....)

From the top of the steps, the Golf Links, the Martello Tower and the loos were in clear view. We kept to the grass, avoiding as far as we could street pavements — grass is more comfortable, plus all that really interested us at this point was the loos, which thank goodness were open. The next ones are at the Valiant Sailor, at the top of the cliffs, and then there is nothing until the Cat and Custard Pot at Paddlesworth (and then there is nothing until Lyminge, in the car-park by the library).

Eventually, we had to walk along the road, but not for long. Soon, straight ahead, we could see our footpath and the start of the real climb (photo right: follow the line of the tarmac and the light colour of the footbridge is evident). The dark sky was full of small sharp hailstones, as we soon discovered.

It was hard work for us, but far from difficult, and there were violets along the way. At the top of the path there is
a nice information board which will tell you much of what you might want to know about the strange terrain you have been clambering up: the Warren. Basically, it is the result of several landslides between 1765 and 1939, with an especially bad one in 1915.2 There are good walks to be had east through the Warren, towards Dover – but not as part of the RSW!

You come out behind the Valiant Sailor pub on the New Dover Road. We turned right along the front of the pub, and then made our tentative way across the road: cars come along here at a great rate. Once on the other side, turn left, and Crete Road East is the next on the right (after the bridleway). We took the footpath in the field which runs above and parallel to it for much of the way. The going was good and we started making a much less embarrassing time for the distance! The views were wonderful (left), despite the cloudiness – you could see the nuclear power station at Dungeness, and even France, but sadly the camera couldn’t see either of them....

As the descent began to where we would cross the Canterbury Road (A260) to get to Crete Road West, the footpath gave out and we had to go down onto the lane. Given the speed some drivers think is appropriate, one is always a bit anxious walking on narrow roads, but it wasn’t too nerve-wracking, and crossing the A260 is much aided by a central reservation.

We turned right (more or less north) into Gibraltar Lane, and soon stopped for lunch – sandwiches from home. The view was not great, and I found the smell of the oilseed rape coming into bloom in the surrounding fields as unpleasant as ever (the domestic comrade apparently isn’t as sensitive to it as I am, but as the week went on, and we encountered so many fields full of it, the odour irritated both of us). When we resumed our hike after lunch

we soon came to a new housing development at Gibraltar, on the south-west edges of Hawkinge. The estate features a footpath of which we took advantage in order to avoid the road-traffic. The notices along this path seemed to be saying we shouldn’t be there, but no-one ordered us off and, although it was like strolling through a linear park, it was much better than the lane. One way and another, this stretch was probably the least enjoyable of the whole day.

Back on Gibraltar Lane we came to a cross-roads, and went straight over onto a field-path. Soon we had our next reward: arriving at the back of the Cat and Custard Pot pub, along a road which the OS map doesn’t name, and which Google Maps says is simply Upper Arpinge. The pub wasn’t the reward (we had no need for drink or a loo at this time): it was that it meant that we were very close to St Oswald’s church. The existing church is mainly twelfth-century (the chancel is thirteenth-century), replacing either the original Saxon church or a later Saxon church which would have replaced the first one.

The original foundation of St Oswald’s is important to the inspiration behind the RSW. Churches named for St Oswald are rare in southern England: most are quite a way to the north. Thus it is believed that the founder was St Eanflæd, who married a brother of King Oswald of Northumbria. Eanflæd was cousin to Eanswythe and the daughter of Ethelburga, daughter of Æthelbert, king of Kent. (Ethelburga had married another, earlier Northumbrian king, but has for over a millennium been better known for her connexion with Lyminge, of which more in due course.) The widowed Eanflæd certainly became abbess at Whitby in about 680 in succession to its founder Hilda (614-680), whose conversion to Christianity had owed much to Ethelburga’s influence as the Christian queen of Northumbria. Plus St Oswald’s is and always has been a chapel of Lyminge church, and I

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3 Here is a list of English churches dedicated to him: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Oswald%27s_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Oswald%27s_Church)

4 This is the Latin name of the Queen and saint and the name she is usually remembered by; “Æ Æthelburh” is the Anglo-Saxon form, which I prefer. But Ethelburga means much more to most people than her real name does.
have an interest in such places, having written the
history of a church which is in some ways similar to
this (St Levan’s, a daughter church of St Buryan in west
Cornwall).

But there was a wedding going on in St Oswald’s....
And the light was so poor that I couldn’t even take a
decent picture of the exterior, sitting as it does some
distance off the road. This was a disappointment, but
not a serious one. Indeed, the following week we took
the afternoon off to walk to St Oswald’s. It is usually
unlocked, but when it is, the people at the Cat and Custard Pot next door (01666 880 249)
are custodians of the key. It was unlocked the day we went.

St Oswald’s, said to be the smallest church in
Kent, is of course extremely unlikely to be the
original building (i.e. c 642). To my untutored
eye, it looked like a Saxon church (those tiny
windows!): in fact it is a twelfth-century chapel
with some additional thirteenth-century work.
It was then more or less neglected until the mid-
Victorian period, when it was rescued from
near-ruin. The external walls were extensively
repaired, the roof was replaced and, to my
regret at least, the internal wall-plaster was
removed above seat height – which gives this
tiny place a cruder air than it deserves. Nevertheless, it has great charm.

2 Paddlesworth to Lyminge

Just after this, the domestic comrade’s left walking boot parted company with its sole.
Luckily, he suspected its failing powers and had packed a spare pair. We moved on.
The next stage was odd: the path is clearly ancient, but the patchwork of fields – or perhaps a mediaeval common – has been replaced with an enormous field, bounded by a diamond-shaped network of unnamed and equally ancient lanes. More or less at the eastern corner of the diamond is the junction with the road from St Oswald’s and Paddlesworth; the south corner is Shearins Bungalow; to the north is Tan Barn; and to the west is Teddars Lea House. The RSW goes from the Paddlesworth Junction pretty much straight across towards Teddars Lea House – a distance of almost a mile. The first half of this stretch looked abandoned – the main crop was flint, with quite a few baby turnips struggling in the very dry soil. Our path was evident only from the tread of so many other walkers’ feet. And then quite suddenly it changed.

Whoever planted whatever it was growing here had also used some kind of herbicide to mark out our route (see left), and as far as that went we were grateful.

The RSW is not in fact quite straight across this field – it veers rather to the south towards the end, and thus meets the road from Shearins Bungalow about two-thirds of the way along towards Teddars Lea House. Once at that western junction, you walk across the junction there and go just a few yards down Teddars Lea Road. The high hedges mask the sign for the footpath, but you cannot miss it close to. Turn right here, and the rest of the route is straightforward – there is only one path, and you follow it.
This is sheep country, and this is lambing time, and we saw plenty of evidence of both. The sheep were not good at posing for pictures, however, and the weather was another problem. This (right) was the best I could do. You will have to believe that the sea was visible at the dip in the horizon...

Coming down the long path here from the tops, and just before the village proper, the bridleway passes over what is clearly a bridge: this is over the line of the long-defunct railway from Folkestone to Canterbury. It was the first time on the RSW that we came into contact with the ghost of the railway, but not the last by any means.

Emerging by the New Surgery on Canterbury Road, we had arrived in Lyminge, the *terminus ad quem* of this first day of our walk. Of course we had first to go straight to the church (St Mary and St Ethelburga): when you emerge from the footpath cross Canterbury Road, and go right; a few yards north take the second road on the left, Mayfield Road, and the church is up ahead of you, in high summer rather hidden by trees. When you turn onto Well Road, you will see ahead of you, on the edge of the road over a steep drop into Well Field, the Victorian shelter which marks St Ethelburga’s Well, the source of the Nailbourne: from this point on, the RSW rarely strays far from this waterway.

The current church building is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086), but was probably very new at that date. The original church, dating from 633 or so, is a buried ruin immediately to the south of the existing one. Even at the time of our walk, it had been thought that some of the ancient north wall formed part of the south wall of the existing church, but the excavations undertaken in the summer of 2019 ruled that out: the walls are quite distinct.

The first Anglo-Saxon church at Lyminge was probably built as part of the convent established at the same time by St
Ethelburga, who is at the very heart of the RSW project (as its name, *Pathways to the Past: exploring the legacy of Ethelburga*, confirms). Daughter of King Æthelbert of Kent and his wife Bertha, she had been a child when Augustine landed in Kent to begin his conversion of the Anglo-Saxons; by the time she was building her convent, she was the widowed refugee Queen of Northumbria and her brother Eadbald was the reigning king of Kent: she almost certainly founded the important church at Lyminge; she was the mother of Eanflæð, the probable founder of Paddlesworth church; she was aunt to Eanswythe, who founded the monastery at Folkestone, great-aunt (according to the Kentish Royal Legend) to Domne Eafe who founded the great double monastery at Minster-in-Thanet, and great-great aunt to Mildrith (aka Mildred), who was abbess at Minster. (This is by no means the end of the list of saints related to Ethelburga, just a list of her relations with close links to East Kent and the RSW.) Ethelburga died in about 647 and was almost certainly buried in Lyminge – a porticus attached to the north wall of the first church was identified in the 2019 dig and is very likely to have housed her remains. They may have been moved to a second Anglo-Saxon church at this site, and they were reported as being in the Norman church until, in the late eleventh century, they were translated from Lyminge to St Gregory’s Priory in Canterbury; when the priory was suppressed in 1535, they disappeared. There is a modern plaque on the exterior wall here in Lyminge commemorating Ethelburga’s burial there, and inside the church, behind the plaque, is a niche for a reliquary – presumably hers – which could have been developed from the ancient porticus. It looks very old, but that is mainly because of the Roman bricks surrounding it. 

I have been accustomed to regard these stories from so long ago as nigh-on myth, involving people about whom we must know very little – but these women were real, and influential, and we know a surprising amount about them, partly because they were royal, and partly because Anglo-Saxon society was more enabling of women than, for example, the Normans....

The church was open. We nipped in to mark the moment, and then went home.

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5 A porticus was a side chapel, often found in early Anglo-Saxon churches.

6
Day 2: Wingmore to Lyminge, via Elham
This was the only time we went from north to south. We took the number 17 bus going north, and alighted at Wingmore (above the head of where the little man is at the top of the map below [and who is facing the wrong way]): the RSW touches the road at this point, and we knew the bus stopped there.

However we then decided to deviate from that route: instead of taking the footpath which leaves the main road a few yards south of the crossroads where the bus stops, we walked down the easterly lane (where the post-box is), keeping on past Ivy Cottage (which runs a B&B business, which may be useful to RSW walkers – but we cannot vouch for it, not having stayed there), and then (after the best part of a kilometre) took the footpath signposted on
the right. This involved us in a much steeper climb than the RSW route proper would have done, but it gave us even better views (left). A particular pleasure of this walk was that we were so often close to roads that we know well and drive along often, yet we were seeing so much more than we ever do from the car. This is mainly a matter of (lack of) speed, and we appreciated it very much on this afternoon.

As you can see in this picture, a lot of work is evidently being done on the signage for footpaths around here: as we came down off our splendid high path and into North Elham, we could see several other footpaths converging, the bright yellow of the way-markers visible from afar. The one to the west, below and now almost parallel to us, was the RSW, with which we soon seamlessly merged ....

We were now on the Elham Valley Way, and following the course of the Nailbourne (which rises close to the church in Lyminge), which was dry here (and remained so most of the rest of our way. Also following the course of the Nailbourne along here is the ghost of the old railway (first encountered as we came off the Downs into Lyminge). Quite a few of the old railway bridges remain, so that, although most traces of the permanent way have disappeared, you can still often see where it used to run.

At North Elham, we crossed over a lane called North Elham Hill, and zig-zagged over to re-join the path going southwards towards Elham. From here to Lyminge, the route is straightforward, except in Elham itself, which I will come to shortly....
In Elham we stopped in the little square, commenting as ever on how the motor-car has swamped this pretty place. The square and the main street are always crammed with vehicles, which cannot help being unsightly; nor is it easy to see how the situation could be avoided. I re-visited St Mary the Virgin (right, with a yew tree in the foreground and angled to avoid the intrusion of any cars), the very fine church on the south side of the square. It replaced a Saxon church on the same site in the late twelfth century and, perhaps because most of its renovation was in the early twentieth century rather than the mid nineteenth century, it has fared better than many. One of the windows in the chancel features likenesses of Gladstone, Disraeli, Lord Salisbury and Thomas Carlyle, which is fun, and I especially like the massive Norman pillars. However there is nothing Saxon left here, and apparently no record of the foundation of the earlier church, and so we moved on.

We turned east from the church, and went along Duck Lane until we reached the Elham Valley Way, and turned south for the final part of the walk, crossing Lickpot Hill after about half a kilometre, which is where we re-joined the RSW. (The RSW takes you left from the front of the church across the bottom of the square, left down Pound Lane and then left again onto Vicarage Lane, at the end of which there is a right onto Lickpot Hill.) Skirting east of Ottinge, we crossed two lanes and came to the last stretch into North Lyminge.

Again, all this area is sheep country, though here we are right in the valley, and the dramatic heights of the Downs which we experienced up near Wingmore are scarcely evident. The sheep could hardly have been less interested in us; a very peaceful return home.
Day 3: Wingmore to Bridge, via Barham, Kingston and Bishopsbourne

1 Wingmore to Barham

We set off up the same lane as we had taken for our walk south to Elham (yet again turning on the tracker a little late!), but this time we turned off the lane very soon, onto a footpath heading east while the lane turned south (bottom left of the map).

The first part of this walk was quite hard going, not helped in that respect by the decision we took not to follow the RSW down to the café at Breach. We have been there, and it is very pleasant, but we didn’t need its facilities, and we also didn’t want to lose the height which we were so breathlessly gaining. So where (quite soon) the RSW turned north towards Whitehall Farm, we carried on eastwards— and upwards— into Middle Row Wood,
and downwards, and upwards again – to reach Bedlam Wood at the top ridge of Lodge Lees Down. Only then did we turn north. The views in Bedlam Wood were very limited, but the wind had died down, there was often hazy sunshine, and the going was very pleasant. So we had no complaints.

And the plant life was delightful. There were (clockwise, below) violets, primroses, common spotted orchids, blackthorn blossom, wood anemones, and a few bluebells – and everywhere, celandines. Plus doubtless much that we missed. A few days later, in perhaps warmer ground, the bluebells were in full cry, but here, on this day, they were barely evident.

We made a couple of unintentional deviations from this non-RSW path, which you can see on the map on the previous page, where our track clearly strays from the dotted green line of the path. In both cases we genuinely missed our way: in the first instance it meant that it took us a while to find our way into the Middle Row wood, and in the second
we followed an older path, not realising until we had walked down and across a steep field that the landowner had installed a new route around the sides, and that we should have turned left as we came out of Middle Row wood, and then taken the fenced path down the hill, joining the old route at the foot. This arrangement was to free the paddocks for the horses, whose large establishment is visible to the north down the valley.

So, back to Bedlam Wood on the high ridge of the Downs. The RSW re-joined our path about two-thirds the way through here, and then suggests staying on the open Downs for about 200 metres further than we did – emerging only where the road forks for Derringstone Downs, and crossing there and switching back along the road for the footpath down into the bottom of the valley. We however kept to the main path, leaving the RSW which forks right; we gained the Elham Valley Road through a field-gate which we had seen so many times from the other side, with no idea of where it could lead you – with no idea that there was even a footpath there, because we never noticed the sign. It was great fun, despite the fact that going downhill does our ancient knees few favours. Through the gate, we crossed straight over and onto the RSW path again, still going down, parallel to the lane. At the bottom, the RSW turns north through another wide gate, and onto the road, which goes alongside the Nailbourne and a vineyard, and which brought us into Derringstone, an attractive little place which is in effect a suburb of Barham. From here on for the rest of the day, we kept to the RSW.

This strange image (above) was taken from the little footbridge that crosses the Nailbourne in Derringstone. The bricks at the bottom of the picture are the side of the bridge, and the brown stuff is the dry dry mud of the dry dry bed of the ‘river’.

We turned right at this bridge, going gently up and back to the main road, here called Valley Road, which we crossed and followed down. The RSW forks right onto what is labelled the Old Valley Road, which seems to be simply a few yards of what used to be a bend on the main street. On this section there is a very handsome Grade-II-listed building called the Red
House. I thought the Georgian frontage might have been added to a much older building behind, as often happened, but it was apparently a new build in the eighteenth-century.

The next stage of the RSW is rather banal by the high standards of this route. Old Valley Road winds back towards Valley Road, but our route goes straight on into The Grove, an established residential cul-de-sac. Two-thirds the way up, there is a vacant lot on the right, and the footpath goes through it into more or less open country. We briefly took the wrong path but then chose the fork to the right, going around east of Barham Court Farm (which belongs to the company running the vineyards in this area), then alongside the new road into the farm, and across The Street into the churchyard of St John the Baptist, Barham. Its distinctive slender copper-clad spire is visible from the main road, but it gives little hint of how interesting the old village centre is.

We stopped to eat our sandwiches in the churchyard, with a very pleasant view of the surrounding houses, notably what is now Anne Court, a fine Grade II* listed building of 17th-18th-century origin, with later additions and refurbishments by Lutyens. It is now divided into flats, which I did not notice despite staring at it throughout my lunch. It shares a garden wall (also listed) with the church. It seems that most of the buildings in this part of Barham are listed. They are certainly very decorative and make a lovely streetscape.

The church was however a disappointment on the day: it was shut, because of an overrun in internal repairs – it was not safe to enter; and the grass was being cut in the churchyard. I have no quarrel with the mower or with the good parishioner wielding it – it was unlucky timing on our part that we could neither get inside the church nor hear ourselves speak outside it. We have no guidebook to the church yet, though we will stop by another time in hope of better luck. I gather that until 1846, the church was a chapel-of-ease to the church.
at Bishopsbourne (which we were to visit later that day), and that it is mainly a twelfth-century structure; the same mason is said to have built the main part of this church and Bishopsbourne’s. There is no mention of any Anglo-Saxon links, and nothing further about the unusual spire.

2 Barham to Bridge, via Kingston and Bishopsbourne

Forgetting as usual to switch the tracking back on until we had gone the first few hundred yards, we set off again along the RSW, which took us down The Street through the beauties of old Barham, and then right along a footpath between houses close to the Duke of Cumberland pub and not far from the main road. It is the second footpath signposted along The Street, but don’t worry if you take the first one, because it joins this one quite soon, as you can see on the map.

We were once again quite close to the Nailbourne, following its course. At Old Elmstead Lane, it looks like virtually every house is listed, but we didn’t have time to investigate that. We turned left towards the main road. We were now walking alongside the grounds of Digges Place, an impressive Grade-II-listed building of early seventeenth-century origin which must have replaced an earlier house here. The Digges family is fascinating; someone should write at least one historical novel about them.
At the main road, we crossed over and took the footpath immediately opposite, going straight up the slope and along the left side of the wood at the top (unnamed on the map), eventually turning north to traverse the wood. Along the short stretch of metalled road here that coincides with the RSW there is a massive railway bridge (right), yet another relic of the old line that ran along this valley. Our footpath was to the left just through the tunnel.

The path is well-signposted, and we soon found ourselves at St Giles’s, Kingston (left), a pretty little church which the Kent Archæological Society judges to be early Norman. There was perhaps a Saxon church here before that, but there is no sign of it, let alone any sign of a building coeval with Lyminge and Folkestone. There was a settlement here at that time, however, because there are many Saxon graves on the slopes south of the church. In one of them, in 1771, an Anglo-Saxon brooch was found by the local vicar – the largest of its kind ever found, and dated to the early 7th century – that is to say, during Ethelburga’s lifetime. It was eventually offered to the British Museum, whose experts strongly recommended its acquisition; but sadly the BM’s Trustees felt that only Græco-Roman remains were worthy of display there, and it ended up in Liverpool. Lucky Liverpool! The village sign at Kingston now consists of a large and quite stunning rendition of the brooch. We didn’t pass the signs on this walk, but one of them can be seen close to the junction of Kingston’s Street with the main road (at this point called Bonnybush Hill).

Resuming the RSW, which now trends steadily north and slightly east, we soon entered a different terrain. Perhaps because of the propinquity of Canterbury, the landscape from

7 A fine picture of the brooch is at http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml/collections/antiquities/anglo-saxon/item-381789.aspx
here to Bridge is dominated by great houses. Ann Court and Digges Place were fine houses, but the buildings that now appeared before us were more like palaces.

*Charlton Place* comes first: a Grade-II*-listed building (not named on the scale of the map shown here, but close to Charlton Farmhouse), it is mainly a Tudor house (built c1570), the frontage having been added in the late 18th or early 19th century. After duty as a great house for the landed gentry (perhaps having been visited by Jane Austen), it was
requisitioned by the army during WWII, and after that was a Barnardo’s home for twenty years. It is now back in private hands, and is available for weddings and other functions.

Soon we were walking along The Street Bishopsbourne and making for the church of St Mary the Virgin, and that was a treat. In what was by now a familiar story to us, the original Saxon church was completely replaced in the thirteenth century. In the mid-late fifteenth century, the west wall of that new church was demolished when the nave was shortened and the impressive tower was built. This seems to be when the fine mediæval stained-glass windows were installed at the east end, and perhaps when the wall drawings were created. In 1872-73, Gilbert Scott was responsible for what the Kent Archæological Society calls
“heavy restoration”. Some of that may be regrettable, but there is also a lovely west window, commissioned from Morris & Co in 1874 to commemorate a former Rector of Bishopsbourne, and made to a design by Edward Burne-Jones (previous page). The scrolls on each section read Spes, Caritas and Fides (Hope, Charity and Faith). William Morris also designed the striking tiles around the altar.

Another treat in Bishopsbourne was Oswalds, an impressive Grade-II-listed eighteenth-century house next door to the church, and the last and grandest of the many houses which the novelist Joseph Conrad lived in around this part of Kent. He died there in 1924 (but is buried in Canterbury Cemetery out near Harbledown).

The signs for our path are clear at the church-gate, and brought us rapidly to Bourne House, one of whose claims to fame is that Mozart stayed here as a child. Definitely grander than Charlton, it is Grade-I-listed and was built in 1701 on the site of an older house; these days it is the home of Lady Juliet Tadgell and holds her fabulous art collection. Neither the house nor the art is open to the public. According to some accounts, the Little Stour rises in the lake here, but others say that the Nailbourne simply changes its name at this point – and the latter interpretation accords with our (strictly amateur) observation.

Bridge Place Manor is a Grade-I-listed Jacobean building: until lately it was a country club, and shortly after we walked by it, it opened as a luxury hotel and restaurant called the Pig at Bridge Place. From a distance we could see what turned out to be the activities of the builders engaged in finishing off their work converting Bridge Place – there certainly was some urgency in their work, with cars and lorries constantly going to and fro, and making our final stretch into Bridge rather less calm than we hoped. Our mood was further changed by discovering that we had fifteen minutes to catch our bus home. We caught it nicely, and it was only when I began to write up our adventures that I realised that we had not visited Bridge church. I had always assumed from the look of St Peter’s that it was a Victorian building – and it pretty much is. St Peter’s was virtually re-built in the mid-nineteenth-century, and there was never a Saxon church here. We will try to visit it soon.
Mid-afternoon, we arrived in Bridge by car, not the bus this time, and parked up at the layby at the top of North Hill going out of Bridge towards the A2 and Canterbury, and walked back to the crossroads where people in cars can turn left or right to avoid being funnelled onto the A2. We had the advantage of being on foot so, ignoring all the roads, we crossed to the south side of the right-hand turn, and took the footpath that goes more or less east from there. In a few minutes, we had joined the route of the RSW, which takes an earlier right turn off Bridge High Street, onto Conygham Lane, opposite the Post Office on the way north out of Bridge. At the end of this lane, the RSW joins the footpath we were on, which, to our delight, took us under the A2. I am sure this bridge is a perfectly safe piece of engineering, but perhaps because it lacks the over-specification of a Victorian railway bridge, it also lacks the grandeur. All the same, it was fun to walk under this virtual motorway (below).
We were then in Bifrons Park. Bifrons House is long gone, demolished in the late 1940s: the bridle-path took us over the (still dry) Nailbourne via a handsome Grade-II-listed eighteenth-century bridge in a loop across Patrixbourne Road and thus up to the village. From here on to the end of the walk, we were following the course of the Nailbourne/Little Stour.

Crossing Patrixbourne Road brought us onto Side Hill: further down this slope, following the North Downs Way rather than peeling off northwards on the RSW, are the remains of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery which was excavated in the mid-nineteenth century. The OS Explorer map does not name the hill nor mark the tumuli, and we did not learn about the cemetery until we read the very useful interpretation board at the church, but I suspect that there is very little to see there now. The site is of similar age to the one at Lyminge (and therefore approximately of the time of Ethelburga), but bigger and with more impressive finds – but of course the treasure has long since been moved to safer places (mainly Maidstone Museum).

And so to the church, St Mary’s, Patrixbourne, which is one of the chief treasures of the Royal Saxon Way (above). It is one of only three churches on the RSW included in Simon Jenkins’s England’s Thousand Best Churches (1999); he awards it two stars, but mentions it in the same breath as Barfreston (four stars), and not in a disparaging way. The south door under the tower (you can see it above, and in greater detail below) is justly famous.
I failed to notice the priest’s door (also on the south side) and will look for it next time: Jenkins suggests that the eroded figure above this latter door represents Thomas Becket, whose martyrdom (1170) occurred at about the time this church was built. Inside there is some lovely stained glass, especially in the stunning wheel window at the east end, but either my skill or my camera was not up to the challenge of photographing any of it. There was a big re-build in the fifteenth century, which included the spire on the (twelfth-century) tower; then in the nineteenth century (in the opinion of the Kent Archæological Society in 1993 and, fwiw, mine), it was “over-restored”.

The Domesday Book mentions a church here, and such evidence as there is suggests it was late Saxon, and stone-built. There was a sixth/seventh-century pagan cemetery in the vicinity, so that does not argue for a church at that date, and in any case, the existing village

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8 This idea is not supported by Mary Berg (in her “Patrixbourne Church: Mediæval Patronage, Fabric and History”, Archæologia Cantiana, vol 122, (2002): an offprint of this article is for sale in the church). Hasted (in his 1798 History of... Kent) thought it might be a statue of the Virgin. This pamphlet also has a useful description of the figures on the South Door pictured above.
of Patrixbourne arrived later than the church (whenever that was). The church’s situation is probably due to the existence of the great house, on the edge of whose park it sits, which might also support the argument that there was no early Anglo-Saxon church.

Next stop, less than a kilometre away, was St Peter’s at Bekesbourne. It was locked. A key is available at Essentially Hops at Chalkpit Farm, Adisham Road, Bekesbourne, during the shop’s opening hours, but it was turned four and we were a little anxious about getting to Littlebourne before that church was locked up – and we could not find out what the opening hours of the shop were. So we will go there another time.

The church is accessed over private land, but the path is (as one would hope) a public right-of-way. It is as usual a twelfth-century building with thirteenth-century additions; the collapsed tower was re-built in 1841 and the whole was heavily restored in the 1880s.

We were compensated for our disappointment here with the existence across the lane (i.e. behind us as we took the picture above) of the site of the former Archiepiscopal Palace. There is apparently evidence of Roman occupation of the site, and there was a building owned by the archbishop here in Norman times, but the Old Palace was first built in the reign of Henry VII, and greatly enlarged by Thomas Cranmer in 1552 (Edward VII’s reign). At the start of the Civil War in 1645, all the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury were destroyed, and only Lambeth Palace in London was ever fully restored. Here in Bekesbourne, a gentleman’s residence (called The Old Palace) was built over the remains of the actual Old Palace about the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: of the
Tudor building, only the gatehouse remains, now mainly a cottage and associated buildings.\textsuperscript{9} Pieces of Anglo-Saxon pottery have been found hereabouts.

It is a beautiful spot.

We went over the (dry) ford (which might be a problem for walkers when the Nailbourne is in water), following the lane up to the junction with School Lane. The RSW is straight ahead, a footpath alongside the Nailbourne and under the railway line. A change in the landscape is quite sudden: it is flatter, and wetter – a lot of drainage channels – not every stream you see is the Nailbourne! – and at times we found the path harder to follow than usual, but it was a pleasant walk. After two and a half kilometres we were in Littlebourne. It was about five o’clock, and had turned into a lovely evening.

\textsuperscript{9} To continue this confusing tale, Bekesbourne Old Palace should not be confused with the Old Palace in the grounds of Canterbury Cathedral, which was built as late as 1900, and which serves as the residence of the primate when he is in Canterbury.
Day 5: Littlebourne to the Blue Bridge, via Wickhambreaux and Preston

1. Littlebourne to Wickhambreaux

We took the 17 all the way into Canterbury to catch the 43 out to Littlebourne, getting off near the post office, and setting off down the footpath which runs down the side of the shop. For most of the way, the RSW was parallel to the path we had taken the previous evening after we left the RSW (that explains the green track you can see).

It is one of the pleasures of walks of this kind to file down those narrow ways that wend between houses and gardens, sometimes following ancient field-boundaries, sometimes following a re-routing to accommodate new housing—nearly always leaving one feeling a little intrusive, but nevertheless seeing more of a town than you ordinarily would. Littlebourne was by no means the only place where this happened to us, but it was one of the best from that perspective.

And as an extra bonus you emerge right opposite the church! Next to it is a very large barn (1340), presumably a tithe barn. It used to be even bigger, but even so is the largest barn of its type remaining in England. It was in agricultural use until the middle of the last century and is now available for charitable and non-profit-making events.

When I saw that the church was dedicated to St Vincent, I assumed that it must be Roman Catholic and that we had not arrived at our destination — but no – this is one of the few Anglican churches devoted to Vincent, patron saint of vintners, vinegar-makers, brickmakers and sailors. The parish council’s online account of the church mentions only vine-dressers, and suggests that the Augustinian monks who originally owned the land grew vines in the district. The same source says that there are only six churches in England dedicated to Vincent; the Kent Archaeological Society describes the dedication as “very rare”.

What eventually became the manor of Littlebourne was granted to the monks at St Augustine’s in Canterbury in 690. A church is certainly mentioned in Domesday, but the only sign of that structure appears to be some Roman brick which you can see on the outside of the south-west nave (St Vincent’s points not east but south-east, so these bricks are on what you might have been assuming was the south wall) — although at the same time, a couple of sources say that the Anglo-Saxon church would have been made of wood. There does not appear to be a lot of information surviving about this church, and nothing about an early Saxon church (that is, coeval with Lyminge, Folkestone or Minster) but given that, as mentioned, the monks held land here from an early date, it is very likely that there was one.
The story of the existing building is that there was a very early Norman church (or perhaps a late Anglo-Saxon church) which was re-built, the nave in the early thirteenth century, and the chancel in the mid-thirteenth century. Part of the aisles were re-built about a hundred years later. In the late eighteenth century the spire was badly damaged in a snowstorm and this may be when part of the north aisle collapsed. The spire and aisle were rebuilt and the roof was replaced – leaving rather less for the Victorians to do than there was in so many other places: but they did restore the chancel in 1865.

The RSW then takes off across the fields behind the church, making for the Little Stour and also the main road (Nargate Street). Fortunately the path is soon shielded from the road by a tall hedge, which makes it much less threatening to the poor walker than the shorter earlier stretch. We were still grateful to be able to turn off the route of the road opposite the eighteenth-century Littlebourne Watermill. It is a very striking building, now private accommodation. There had been a mill at this site since Domesday at least: it is hard to appreciate how important mills were to a local economy for centuries, and at the same time how much they were resented. Through the feudal period and well beyond, farmers were often compelled to take their grain to the manorial mill for grinding, and to pay a high price for the privilege— and this mill (in a previous incarnation) was owned by the manor of Littlebourne, run originally if not by the monks themselves, certainly for their profit.

St Andrew’s, Wickhambreaux is a bare two kilometres from Littlebourne. It faces at least as far south from east as Littlebourne, but is not otherwise especially similar. The most striking aspect of the building is the east window (pictured left).

10 Country Life says that the mill-wheel still works, while Wikipedia says all the machinery was removed in the 1960s (perhaps they mean just the internal workings). For many years it had a large sign on it advertising Hovis flour, and photographs of it survive, showing also that some upper windows have been added since.
Installed in 1896, the rich colours are reminiscent of Tiffany lamps – which is no coincidence. The window, an Annunciation, was designed by a Danish artist, Arild Rosenkrantz, and made by a New York stained glass workshop – the first commission for a European church to be made in the USA. The workshop belonged to one John La Farge, himself a stained-glass artist whose experiments in opalescent glass were ground-breaking – he showed his results to his fellow stained-glass artist, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and some years later the two men fell out over the patents they had each been granted for making very similar stained glass. The commission to make the glass for this window came from some rich newcomers to the village, whom it seems fair to call dodgy. However their money was good for this venture, and means that a little church on the edge of the Wantsum marshes boasts an outstanding example of American Art Nouveau.

Domesday mentions a church here, and the assumption seems to be that it was Anglo-Saxon and of early foundation. The guide to the church speaks of it as a minster, or mother church, as Lyminge and Minster-in-Thanet were, but I am not sure how reliable that is, given that the first reference to it is in Domesday, and no trace of an earlier building has been found – that is to say, there was an earlier church (the one mentioned in Domesday), but there seems nothing to indicate that it was either seventh-century or replaced a church of that antiquity. The Domesday church (if one may call it that) was entirely re-built in the fourteenth century, and then extensively restored in 1878 – for example the walls of the chancel were entirely refaced with knapped flint and new pointing. The restoration was not well-received: there was a protest from some parishioners at the removal of boards showing the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments, and at the paintings, in colour, of angels (mediaeval work which had been discovered under the plaster and then heavily restored). This and much else was regarded as inappropriate for a Protestant church. Nevertheless, and apart from the chancel having since been plastered, the changes remain. The effect (theology apart) is of a very pretty little church.

The mediaeval glass (showing Salome beheading John the Baptist) which had graced one of the two lancet windows formerly in the east end can now be seen in the south aisle of the nave. The restored mediaeval wall paintings are matched with a ceiling painting of apparently unknown provenance (above right), showing a somewhat lacklustre night sky. Those controversial angels look to me much more Arts and Crafts than mediaeval, which is...
sad insofar as we can no longer see anything much of the original work, but they are an unusual and attractive feature.

The map of this stretch (p33) illustrates an oddity of our tracking software. When it loses contact with us (as often happens in churches), it goes into a bit of a spin and locates us anywhere within ten metres or more of where we last were. Hence the rather strange route we seem to have taken in the vicinity of St Andrew’s.

2 Preston
The map below is confusing for two reasons: firstly, we left the RSW at the Blue Bridge and struck off north-west (east of Grove) in order to reach the outskirts of Upstreet and the bus which we thought (correctly) we might just catch back into Canterbury. We had had the notion that we might complete this walk – that we might get all the way to Minster-in-Thenet that day – but by this stage, we had decided that even if we could, we didn’t want to. Secondly it is confusing because the latter part of our diversion to the bus-stop is overlain by our route the following day, when we got off the bus across the road from where we had got on the previous evening, and made our way to the nearest point on the RSW.

The contours of the old Wantsum Channel, a salt-water passage joining the Thames Estuary and the English Channel and dividing mainland Kent from the Isle of Thanet, shrunk over the years, a process helped from time to time by human endeavour. At some point about five hundred years ago it was reduced to two small rivers, the Stour (fed by the Great Stour and the Little Stour), and the Wantsum; at the same time, the same silting had also gradually reduced the flow and depth of those rivers further inland. To look just at the Little Stour, first Bridge, then Littlebourne, then Wickhambreaux and finally Stourmouth were no longer navigable, and by then the Isle of Thanet was no longer a sea-girt island. However, some of these towns and villages which used to be on the shores of the Wantsum remained viable ports until much later. For example, Fordwich (which is on the Great Stour, a couple of miles north-east of Canterbury) was still a port in 1800.

It is helpful for walkers of the RSW to know at least a little of this geographical history. We had noticed a marked change in the landscape when we were around Littlebourne (p33): the amount of water on the ground – streams, ponds, drains, ditches, marshes and of course the Little Stour itself (the river formerly known as the Nailbourne) – becomes more and more evident. Wherever the boundary between the Downs and the ancient Wantsum Channel might lie, by the time you are walking beside the gravel-pits, weirs and fords
between Wickhambreaux and Preston-next-Wingham, it no longer feels like the North Downs. It is hard (or it was hard for us) to imagine busy port-scenes along here, but it isn’t hard to imagine it as a former seaside.

And spring was definitely springing. It was positively warm, not as warm as it had freakishly been the previous February, but too warm to wear a jumper. Not perfect walking weather, but pretty perfect weather by any other criterion.

And then we had to make for the hills – the last of the Downs I suppose – up north-east towards Preston Court. A highlight of this stretch of the walk was the stile which features in the picture at the end of this account. The church of St Mildred (which is visible in the distance in that picture, directly above the stile) is in the purlieus of the village, next to Preston Court Farm, which uses its proximity to run a business staging wedding receptions – as well as an annual steam rally and various ploughing contests. There was no wedding the day we were there, but the church was locked and the farm seemed deserted. There was also scant information about the church, which was altogether a pity.

The church was reputedly founded in 700 by Mildrith (660–730), indisputably Abbess of the community at Minster-in-Thanet founded by her mother Domne Eafe; Mildrith (aka Mildred, was thus, according to the Kentish Royal Legend, the great-granddaughter of Ethelburga’s brother Eadbald, king of Kent). The original dedication would not have been to the founder, but I have found very little about the church, and very little indeed about the Anglo-Saxon building.
It is an unusual building (picture on previous page). The English Heritage listing says that the dormers are fourteenth century, part of an overhaul carried out at that time on what is basically an early thirteenth-century building, but other sources say that the dormers are Victorian. Some of the walls are Anglo-Saxon, but which parts I do not know.

Inside (where of course we did not go) there is a library, which neatly brings together my interest in churches and books. The English Heritage listing says of it:

Parochial Library: in south aisle a cupboard with door of 2 raised and fielded panels, painted with inscription:

Dr. Bray’s Parochial Library
For the use of the founder of the S.P.C.K. in 1710
Vicars of Preston.

The library was 1 of only 10 in Kent, and the only one to survive in the Parish’s hands (41 of original 67 books).11

Perhaps I will get to see it some other time, and observe what effect those dormers have on the interior.

Leaving the church the RSW took us around three sides of a notional square, before leading us back down into the valley, into the former-seaside landscape. We were tiring fast for some reason – we had only come six kms so far that day – and we were beginning to realise that it would be silly to push ourselves to get to Minster. This was supposed to be about enjoying ourselves, after all! And so, as mentioned earlier, we peeled off the path at Blue Bridge, and made our way to Upstreet and the bus.

The main thoughts we had about this latter non-RSW stage was how close we had been to the Great Stour here – we reached it at Red Bridge, a scant kilometre north; and how little we enjoy walking along roads. The traffic was not heavy at all, but we did not feel very safe. At Red Bridge we got onto the riverside path to Grove Ferry and the marina there. This took us through carparks and picnic grounds, which wasn’t a vast improvement on the road, but it was a relief.

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11 See https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101376652-church-of-st-mildred-preston#.XNfsFS_Mzs0. (I have reformatted it to make sense of the wording, which is mangled at the website.)
Day 6: West Stourmouth to Minster-in-Thanet

The next morning we made our way back to Upstreet, and took the Saxon Shore Way across the fields from Red Bridge as far as the Little Stour. We carried straight on and into the hamlet of West Stourmouth. (This means that we missed out a kilometre or so of the RSW – the section north from Blue Bridge to this point – but I am confident that we did not miss much. It must be very similar indeed to the previous kilometre or so of the path.)

All Saints is a charming church, Grade-I-listed but redundant, and in the excellent care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Do not let those fourteenth- and fifteenth-century windows deceive you – most of the west wall and all of the north and south walls of the chancel are Anglo-Saxon. I was so pleased to learn this that the only external pictures I took were of Saxon walls – not one of the whole building. I think that this picture (below) is of the north chancel wall. It is at least a thousand years old. Such things mean a great deal to me, though I am not sure why.
The brick buttress is not Saxon.... Inside there are handsome box pews with fine poppy-heads, and there is a grave in the chancel with a charming epitaph to Thomas Beake, who died, apparently greatly lamented, in 1734, aged 65. The very long list of his merits ends thus: “He was a sweet temper’d, Vertuous Man And a good Christian.”

We took the path north out of West Stourmouth: the picture (above) is a typical view of this part of the river, and of the path. As it starts to turn definitively east, the RSW rejoins the route of the Saxon Shore Way and also of the Little Stour. As we approached Plucks Gutter, there was an increasing number of moored boats secured behind fences and hedges – which may be how it was that we failed to see the point where the Great Stour comes in from the north-west to create the River Stour, which then takes the long way round to the English Channel at Pegwell Bay.

The Dog and Duck is by the bridge at Plucks Gutter, and for once we stopped at a pub. We rushed for the loos, and then had an excellent espresso before resuming our walk. I think that the church at Minster-in-Thanet was already visible at this point. It was upon leaving the pub that we made our first extended digression from the RSW since our initial decision to take the east loop from St Eanswythe rather than the western side: we crossed the
bridge — entering the Isle of Thanet — and walked a few metres up the road to a footpath which parallels the road for a few hundred metres and then turns right onto the Abbot’s Wall. This earthwork was built on the orders of an abbot of St Augustine’s in about 1300, presumably to keep flood waters off land which was slowly being taken into cultivation or used for salt panning.

The beginning of the Wall is not very obvious, but the line of trees bearing off to the right in the distance (picture left above) is a better preserved section, and that was where we headed. The picture (right) gives a good idea of what it is like. We followed it as far as we could: the wall continued, but access to the path did not. We tried to find a way through, as you can see from the knot in the track of our route, but it was not possible. So we returned to the RSW, which was still following the Stour, and making for Marsh Farm Road.

Minster was certainly in sight by this time, shining in the sun like a city on a hill. It was beautiful, but also frustrating, because it never appeared to get any closer. And yet again we strayed from the path: we were unsure of the status of Marsh Farm Road — it appeared to run only to the farm, and might be very quiet, but in case it had traffic, we decided to take the field paths into Minster. These paths twist and wind, and sometimes took us in the opposite direction to the town, and we were feeling rather tired, but at least the church was starting to look quite near.

We eventually got into the town, and noted the way to the railway station, where we would later catch the train to Canterbury. The church was now towering above us, apparently on a hill — but since Minster is scarcely above sea-level here I am not sure how that effect is created. All the same, we certainly walked a (short) distance up a steepish slope and into
the churchyard. It was now half past five and the sun was quite low, making flattering shadows in the landscape, not that Minster church needs flattery.

The area of Minster was of considerable importance long before this wonderful church was built: close by is the natural harbour which is probably Ebbsfleet (the Thanet Ebbsfleet, that is), and there was a large Roman villa at what is now Abbey Farm, and also, it is believed, an
early Saxon Royal vill (settlement). In fact in these respects it is similar to Lyminge – plus the two places also have a church of seventh-century foundation. Minster’s was a generation or so later, founded in about 670, probably by Eafe as part of her monastery. Eafe (usually referred to as Domne Eafe) was the first Abbess, and her daughter Mildrith was the second. Both of them may be descendants of St Ethelburga’s brother, Eadbald, king of Kent, through his son Eormenred, and thus niece and great-niece respectively of St Eanswith – genealogies differ. Whatever Mildrith’s ancestry, there seems little doubt that she was educated in France: this seems wonderful to me.

Tatton-Brown says there may be “fragments” of an Anglo-Saxon church in the chancel, but I did not know what to look for; otherwise he finds nothing earlier than Norman. However he suspects that the remains of that first Minster church (destroyed by the Danes in 1011) are underneath this church, which was rebuilt from c 1030. It has been extended and altered ever since. We had been afraid that the church might be locked (and have since learned that it often is) – but we were lucky. The door is at the west end, and when we walked in my thought was that I had seen smaller cathedrals. That may or may not be true, but I have certainly been in cathedrals which impressed me less, though some of the impact here was because I was not expecting anything so lovely. I have since seen that the total length east to west is 160 feet, while the length of the transepts, north to south is more than half that. It is a wonderful space. It also has misericords in the choir worthy of a cathedral.

The church was open this late in the day because someone was there doing the flowers, and she was most welcoming. She turned on the lights, pointed us to the best of the misericords and apologised for there being no copies of the guide available. I still did not manage to take any good pictures of the interior.

Minster was a fitting end to our long walk. Tired, but also rested and happy, we toddled down to the station and began to make our way home.

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12 See Appendix 1 for the link to his KAC article on this church.
Appendix 1: Summary of our route by churches, distances and timings

No+pp = Sequential numbering of the churches *en route* + the pages in the blog where pages where that church is discussed
Notes = a brief description of the walking terrain, and of any deviations we took from the RSW

*NB this account covers much more than the churches, but this is here as a quick reference point.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No+pp</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Royal Saxon connexion?</th>
<th>Evidence of Saxon building</th>
<th>Sources (see end for list)</th>
<th>Best bits</th>
<th>Notes on the route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Folkestone</td>
<td>8.1 kms</td>
<td>SS Mary &amp; Eanswythe</td>
<td>St Eanswith</td>
<td>Fallen into the sea long since</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/arch-cant/vol/16/st-eanswitheanswythe-reliquary-folkestone-church">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/arch-cant/vol/16/st-eanswitheanswythe-reliquary-folkestone-church</a></td>
<td>The relic of St Eanswith is very likely here</td>
<td>Locked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1068556">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1068556</a></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1068556">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1068556</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAD.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAD.htm</a></td>
<td>If locked, key available from the pub next door</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paddlesworth</td>
<td>4.7 kms</td>
<td>St Oswald</td>
<td>St Ethelburga’s nephew-in-law, and brother-in-law to her daughter St Eanfled</td>
<td>No. 12th-13th century</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAD.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAD.htm</a></td>
<td>“The smallest church in Kent” and relative remoteness</td>
<td>Flat going for the most part: steepish downhill into Lyminge. No known deviation from the route!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242255">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242255</a></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242255">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242255</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lyminge</td>
<td>4.7 kms</td>
<td>SS Mary &amp; Ethelburga</td>
<td>St Ethelburga and St Eadburga</td>
<td>No. Norman. The remains of the original church are buried immediately to the south of the church,</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/LYM.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/LYM.htm</a></td>
<td>Its history (and the expectations of the 2019 excavations!)</td>
<td>Usually open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242122">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242122</a></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242122">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1242122</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 kms</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Elham</td>
<td>We did this section from the opposite direction, but for clarity present it here as though we went from Lyminge to Elham (and on to Wingmore). Flat route along the valley, close to the old railway line. A small deviation in Elham, taking a shorter route to the footpath.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elham</td>
<td>St Mary the Virgin</td>
<td>Earlier church has completely disappeared.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6 kms</td>
<td>3½ hrs</td>
<td>Elham</td>
<td>A deviation at Wingmore (which [see previous note] was where we actually began this section), when we went down the lane, leaving us with a steeper hill to climb than the 'proper' route. Our reward was even better views from the top! Another deviation (the following day) because we did not need to go to Breach, and therefore climbed higher into the hills before descending near Derringstone.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 kms</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>Barham</td>
<td>St John the Baptist</td>
<td>We did not see inside, but the setting in the old village was lovely.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>St Giles</td>
<td>A fine early Norman church with later medieval additions and not too messed up by the Victorians.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bishopsbourne</td>
<td>St Mary the Virgin</td>
<td>The William Morris / Burne-Jones window</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 kms</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Bishopsbourne</td>
<td>A continuation of the same terrain as the previous section</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>St Peter</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>12th century</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/BRI.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/BRI.htm</a> <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1336512">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1336512</a> (Grade II*)</td>
<td>Did not visit it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 kms</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
<td>A continuation of the same terrain as the previous two sections: slight climb up and down at the end, coming into Bridge. Needing to park our car for the day the next day, we missed out the stretch of the RSW which passes through Bridge. The RSW then passes under the A2, still following the Nailbourne.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>27-29</td>
<td>Patrixbourne</td>
<td>St Mary</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAT.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/PAT.htm</a> Simon Jenkins (England’s Thousand Best Churches), p 326, 2 stars <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1336572">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1336572</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6 km</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Following the Nailbourne. Gentle landscape.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bekesbourne</td>
<td>St Peter</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None known, apparently</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bridgechurchgroup.co.uk/beckesbourne-church.php">http://www.bridgechurchgroup.co.uk/beckesbourne-church.php</a> <a href="http://www.littlebourne-parish-council.co.uk/your-village/groups-organisations/st-vincent-s-church/">http://www.littlebourne-parish-council.co.uk/your-village/groups-organisations/st-vincent-s-church/</a> <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1298996">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1298996</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 kms</td>
<td>1¼ hrs</td>
<td>Signs of the impending change in the landscape, from chalk downland to reclaimed marsh. Flat, easy walking. The Nailbourne has now become the Little Stour.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>31-32</td>
<td>Littlebourne</td>
<td>St Vincent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None known, apparently</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/LIT.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/LIT.htm</a> <a href="http://www.littlebourne-parish-council.co.uk/your-village/groups-organisations/st-vincent-s-church/">http://www.littlebourne-parish-council.co.uk/your-village/groups-organisations/st-vincent-s-church/</a> <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1051071">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1051071</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 kms</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>Still following the valley of the Little Stour, the path is very close to a moderately busy road for a short stretch.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>32-34</td>
<td>Wickhambreaux</td>
<td>St Andrew</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New 14th century church, replacing earlier one in Domesday</td>
<td><a href="https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/WIC.htm">https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/WIC.htm</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 kms</td>
<td>1¼ hrs</td>
<td>A very different landscape emerging. A great deal of water everywhere. Easy walking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Preston</td>
<td>St Mildred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1376652">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1376652</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 kms</td>
<td>2 hrs</td>
<td>Definitely in the marshes now. Very flat. Deviation from the route because of need to go to Upstreet to catch the bus during this leg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>West Stourmouth</td>
<td>All Saints</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Much of the walls.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/visit/church-listing/all-saints-west-stourmouth.html">https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/visit/church-listing/all-saints-west-stourmouth.html</a> (In the care of the Churches Conservation Trust) <a href="https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1203363">https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1203363</a> (Grade I)</td>
<td>The Anglo-Saxon walls</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Walking now mostly where the Wantsum Channel used to be. The Little Stour looks like a real river now, as it joins the Great Stour and becomes the Stour (not that we noticed!). Major deviation after Plucks Gutter, taking the Abbots Wall route and then field paths rather than riverside paths and then the road into Minster.

| 15 | Minster-in-Thanet | St Mary | Domne Eafe & Mildrith | Beneath the current church? | https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/MIT.htm | https://www.trinhall.cam.ac.uk/library/the-queen-and-the-saint-two-royal-women-of-kent/ | Simon Jenkins (England’s Thousand Best Churches), p 323, 3 stars (Grade 1) | The view into the church from the west door; the view from a distance across the Marsh | Often locked |

Sources used for this table

- Reports by Tim Tatton-Brown for the Kent Archæological Society (technical) (https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/01/03/00.htm)
- Historic England Listings (Grade I, Grade II*, etc, and the reasons why) (https://historicengland.org.uk/sitesearch)
- A Clerk of Oxford (a delightful blog which is very informative, but very hard to search) (https://aclerkoxford.blogspot.com)
- Simon Jenkins, England’s Thousand Best Churches (Penguin, 2000) (only three of the RSW churches are there, but he does exclude churches which are locked)
- The Churches Conservation Trust website (https://www.visitchurches.org.uk)
- The websites of the church itself or the local parish councils and similar are of varying usefulness. The ones mentioned above seem good, and I used them in the absence of other reliable sources.
Appendix 2: Public transport map

Royal Saxon Way
Public transport map

Canterbury
Minster-in-Thanet

Not to scale

Notes on buses between Canterbury and Minster

§ Buses serving these stops are further away from the RSW, but the 8 is much more frequent than the 11 (and than the 9)

# If you wish to travel from Canterbury to Preston and East Stourmouth, it may be faster to take the train to Minster and catch the bus going back to Canterbury

This information is to help you plan your walk along the Royal Saxon Way (RSW). It does not tell you how to get to the RSW from elsewhere. You are strongly advised to consult a timetable before beginning your trip.

KEY
- not part of the RSW
- trains
- The RSW
- 11 Bus route numbers

For timetable information go to https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/bus-travel/plan-your-bus-journey

[RSW v3 10v19 srh]
Appendix 3: Sources for the history of the church at Lyminge

The history of the Lyminge site awaits an authoritative rewrite following the 2019 excavations. In the meantime, there is a good preliminary summary of what was unearthed at [https://geopaethas.com/2019/08/11/day-30-round-up-on-a-revelatory-5-weeks-of-digging/](https://geopaethas.com/2019/08/11/day-30-round-up-on-a-revelatory-5-weeks-of-digging/).

This post about Ethelburga from the blog *A Clerk of Oxford* is excellent: [https://aclerkofoxford.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-story-of-thelburh-of-kent.html](https://aclerkofoxford.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-story-of-thelburh-of-kent.html).

Robert Baldwin’s “The First Church at Lyminge” and his “Whatever Happened to St Ethelburga?” is really helpful, though now out-of-date in parts. They are in part 10 of the Lyminge Historical Society’s series *Lyminge, a History*, (published by History Research, Lyminge, 2018), chaps 70 and 76 respectively, and available in the village shop and by post from the LHS at lymingehistoricalsociety@gmail.com; go to [http://www.lymingehistoricalsociety.co.uk/contact.html](http://www.lymingehistoricalsociety.co.uk/contact.html) for more details.