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Text: Medway Swale Estuary Partnership
Photography: Mark Lawrence, www.davewise.biz
Maps: Sue Meheux, Medway Council

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Introduction

Welcome to this new edition of Circular Walks on the Hoo Peninsula. As with the revised Cuxton and Halling guide, it contains six walks of varying lengths. The routes have been devised to help as many people as possible explore this unique and somewhat still remote area.

For ease of use all the walks have been colour-coded, both in this publication and on the waymarking used along the routes. This should ensure that no further directional information is needed. All distances and times given are approximate and refer to the circular walks only, not the links used to access them.
Countryside Access Charter

The rights of way are:
• Public footpaths - on foot only. These are waymarked in yellow
• Bridleways - on foot, horseback and pedal cycle. These are waymarked in blue
• Byways - all traffic. These are waymarked in red
• Road used as public paths (RUPPs) - are currently undergoing reclassification.

On rights of way you can:
• Take a pram, pushchair or wheelchair if practicable
• Take a dog (on a lead or under close control)
• Take a short diversion around an illegal obstruction or remove it sufficiently to get past.

And, wherever you go, please follow the Countryside Code:
• Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
• Leave gates and property as you find them
• Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
• Keep dogs under close control
• Consider other people.
Upnor Castle
This impressive castle was built in the 16th century and designed to defend Chatham Dockyard from attack. It failed spectacularly though, when in 1667 the Dutch navy sailed up the river and destroyed much of the anchored British fleet. A frequent visitor to Upnor was the artist JMW Turner, who painted the castle in 1831.

Upnor High Street
Upnor’s High Street is a charming cobbled street lined with terraced weather-boarded houses, leading down towards the river. A more recent addition is Manna house, completely hand-built from Kentish oak in a traditional Tudor style.

St Mary’s Island
Throughout much of the 19th century, huge prison hulks were moored along the river, including just off the St Mary’s Island. Many of the prisoners who died whilst on board were later buried there.

The London Stones
These two obelisks mark the southern extent of the City of London’s fisherman’s rights to fish on the northern side of the river. The smaller stone is thought to have originally come from Yantlet creek.

Cockham Wood Fort
Built in the late 16th century as a direct result of the Dutch raid in 1667, the fort originally held 48 guns. Within a 100 years, the arsenal had been removed and the fort had begun to fall into ruins. The red brick remains of the fort can be seen from the beach at the high water mark.

Hoo Fort
Hoo Fort and its neighbour Darnet were built in the 1870s as part of the defences against an expected French invasion. They were originally intended to mount 25 guns on two tiers, but it soon became clear that the forts would sink into the marsh under the weight. Both forts are privately-owned and cannot be visited.

St Werburgh Church
The church dates mainly from the 14th century, but stands on the site of a much older Saxon building. St Werburgh was a devoutly religious princess believed to have been responsible for an
unrecorded miracle in the village in the seventh century. There are five yew trees in the churchyard, of which one is believed to be over a 1,000 years old. The artist William Hogarth visited the church in 1793 during his walking tour of the peninsula and the Isle of Sheppey.

**Hoo St Werburgh**
This unassuming village mentioned in the Domesday Book, has only been formally known by its full name since 1968. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the area was a hive of industrial activity, with the surrounding agricultural land used to provide gravel and the raw materials for bricks and pottery.

**Hoo Marina**
The river frontage around here was originally used by barges to take away the raw materials from the surrounding landscape. A number of their derelict hulks can still be seen today.

**Pillboxes**
During the Second World War, the peninsula was of national strategic importance. A number of defensive features still remain today, including at least 29 pillboxes.

**Lodge Hill Camp**
This has been home to the Defence Explosive Ordnance Disposal School since 1966.

**Cooling Street**
This hamlet was once home to the Beehive Public House, a tiny circular thatched beer house.

**Berry Court Wood**
This wood is a remnant of a traditional coppice woodland. It is also home to the strange Stag’s Horn or Candle-snuff fungus, which grows on dead wood.

**Weslyan Chapel**
Once known as ‘The Chapel in the Orchard’ it also served the village school. The building still remains but is now a private house.
Walk 1 - Upnor to Hoo St Werburgh

Black route

Distance: 4 miles (6.4km)
Time: Allow 2 hours
Terrain: Some surfaced paths and roads. A long stretch of beach. One fairly steep path.

Points of interest
1. Upnor High Street
2. Upnor Castle
3. The London Stones
4. St Mary’s Island
5. Cockham Wood Fort
6. Hoo Fort
7. St Werburgh Church
Walk 2 - Hoo

Brown route

Distance:  3 miles (4.8km)  
Time:    Allow 2 hours  
Stiles:   2  
Terrain:  Flat unmade tracks which can get muddy. One surfaced road.

Points of interest

1. Hoo Fort  
2. WW2 Pillboxes  
3. Hoo St Werburgh  
4. Hoo Marina  
5. St Werburgh Church
Walk 3 - Chattenden Woods

Green route

Distance: 4 miles (6.4km)
Time: Allow 2 hours
Terrain: Some surfaced paths, some road walking. Unmade tracks through woodland. One fairly steep ascent and descent.

Points of interest

1. Lodge Hill
2. Weslyan Chapel
3. Cooling Street
4. Berry Court Wood
Cliffe village
Cliffe is believed to have begun life as the ancient Saxon settlement of Cloveshoo, later translating as Cliffe at Hoo. By the Middle Ages, Cliffe had become a fairly prosperous town with a thriving port and large farm. The surrounding landscape owes much to the 19th century cement industry, which dug quarries in search of clay. These have flooded over time and become havens for wildlife.

Cliffe Church
The impressive church of St Helen’s was originally built around 1260 in the local style of alternating layers of Kentish ragstone and black flint. The churchyard includes the 19th century Grade II listed Charnel House, historically used to store the bodies or bones of the dead.

Cooling Castle
The privately-owned Cooling Castle is actually a fortified manor house built in 1380 and would have originally stood much closer to the river. The gatehouse remains in an impressively good condition and can be easily viewed from the adjacent road.

Cooling Church
The church of St.James’ dates mainly from the 13th century and has an interesting vestry covered in shells. Its churchyard is home to a group of lozenged - shaped gravestones, believed to have inspired the opening scenes of Charles Dickens epic novel Great Expectations.

Well Penn Road
This ancient route takes its name from the Old English ‘Wielle Pund’, meaning a pound, or an enclosure, by a spring.

High Halstow
The village takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon word Hagelstowe (also hagelsto or Agelstow) meaning ‘high holy place’. Its 10th century church of St Margaret stands on the peninsula’s highest point and was referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086.
St Mary Hoo
This tiny hamlet was first recorded in 1240 and originally much larger. Its 14th century church was largely reconstructed around 1881 and is now a private dwelling. Its 18th century vicar the Reverend Robert Burt is believed to have performed the illegal marriage ceremony between the future George IV and Maria FitzHerbert in 1785.

Northward Hill
Established in 1955, this is the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds’ (RSPB) oldest nature reserve and is only one of three woodlands on the peninsula. Its abundance of mature oak trees make it ideal territory for grey herons and it is actually the largest heronry in England. The woodland is also renowned for its springtime display of bluebells.

Swigshole
The name Swigshole, sometimes also spelt Snagshole, means ‘snake-infested muddy pool’.

Allhallows
The original settlement takes its name from its 12th century church of All Saints. The church is the peninsula’s only Grade 1 listed building.

Allhallows-on-Sea
Originally planned to transform the area into a major seaside resort during the 1930s, much of the proposed development never went ahead. Had it done so the area would be very different today as the proposals included zoological gardens, the country’s largest swimming pool, several hotels and up to 5,000 houses.

Yantlett Creek
This once navigable creek was part of a trading route used since the Roman occupation of Britain. It is also what originally made the Isle of Grain a true island.

The London Stone
This stone marks the northern extent of the City of London’s fisherman’s rights to fish on the northern side of the river. The southern boundary is marked by two stones at Lower Upnor.
Walk 1 - Cliffe to Cooling

Black route

Distance: 3.5 miles (5.6km)
Time: Allow 2 hours
Terrain: Unmade tracks across fields which can get muddy. Some road walking.

Points of interest
1. Cliffe Church
2. Cooling Castle
3. St James’ Church
4. Well Penn Road
Walk 2 - High Halstow to St Mary Hoo

Brown route

Distance: 4 miles (6.4km)
Time: Allow 2 hours
Stiles: 7
Terrain: Unmade tracks and paths which can get muddy.
One surfaced path. Some road walking.

Points of interest

① High Halstow
② Northward Hill Nature Reserve
③ St Mary Hoo
④ Swigshole
Walk 3 - Allhallows Marshes

Green route

Distance: 4.5 miles (7km)
Time: Allow 2 hours 30 minutes
Terrain: Flat unmade paths and tracks which can get muddy

Points of interest
1. Allhallows
2. Allhallows-on-Sea
3. Yantlett Creek
4. The London Stone
**Local information**

**Medway Visitor Information Centre**
The centre provides information on local attractions, events and accommodation. 95 High Street, Rochester ME1 1LX. Phone: 01634 843666 www.medway.gov.uk

**National Rail**
This provides information on rail timetables and fares across the UK, but does not sell tickets. Phone: 0845 7 48 49 50 www.nationalrail.co.uk

**Traveline**
This partnership provides a public transport route and timetable information. Phone: 0871 200 22 33 www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk

**Useful organisations**

**Campaign to Protect Rural England** (CPRE)
This registered charity campaigns to protect and enhance the countryside for the benefit of all. Phone: 01303 815180 www.cprekent.org.uk

**English Heritage**
The government’s statutory advisor on the historic environment ensures that it is properly maintained and cared for. Phone: 0870 333 1181 www/english-heritage.org.uk

**The Environment Agency**
This public body is responsible for protecting and improving the environment in England and Wales. Phone: 08708 506506 www.environment-agency.gov.uk

**Medway and Swale Estuary Partnership**
The partnership was formed to address issues affecting the economic, environmental and social well-being of the estuary. Phone: 01634 338891 www.msep.org.uk

**The Open Spaces Society**
Britain’s oldest conservation society is dedicated to protecting common land and Public Rights of Way. Phone: 01491 573535 www.oss.org.uk

**Natural England**
Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the well-being and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity that it brings. Phone: 0845 600 3078 www.naturalengland.org.uk

**The Ramblers**
Britain’s biggest organisation for walkers campaigns for their continued enjoyment of the countryside. Phone: 0207 3398500 www.ramblers.org.uk
Further information

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CIRCULAR WALKS ON THE
Hoo Peninsula

Key to maps

P Car parking

Viewpoint

Toilet

Refreshments

Point of interest

PH Public house

Caution
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