

Discovering 2,000 years of history and nature around Newington in Kent



Walk No. 9801831

A mainly flat walk in countryside surrounding a small Kent village which dates to pre-Roman times and that was on the route for Chaucer's pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. Walk in the footsteps of Julius Caesar, see the remains of a Roman town and the site of World War I trenches and visit a fine 14th century church. Along the way are former watercress beds, historic orchards and centuries-old farms and houses. The figure of eight walk twice passes near an 18th century pub for refreshments.

Calculated time : 3h10	Difficulty : Average
Distance : 6.3mi	Return to the departure point : Yes
Vertical gain : 315ft	Activity : Walking
Vertical drop : 315ft	Location : Newington (Kent)-1
Highest point : 226ft	
Lowest point : 23ft	

Description

(D/A) From Newington High Street, walk south along Bull Lane. Take the public footpath ZR63 on the left, opposite the small park and next to No 77, the house with the stone swans. Climb the stile, go diagonally across the field and follow the footpath up Standard Hill, keeping the hedge on your left.

(1) Pass through the gate to go to the other side of the hedge. Stop to enjoy the view over the Medway estuary, Turn right to walk along the ridge with a large beacon on the hill on your left which marks the line of First World War defences. Continue along the footpath with the hedge on your right.

(2) Passing through the kissing gate at the end takes you onto a narrow country road. Stop and only cross the road when you are sure it is clear. Turn left along Wormdale Hill and, when the road bends right, cross back across the road and take footpath ZR64 that runs to the left of the 16th century Wormdale Farmhouse.

(3) Cross the stile on the right and follow footpath ZR72, taking great care as you cross the golf course. Turn left onto ZR72A for 50m, left again onto ZR66 and uphill for about 100 metres. As you reach the top of the incline, notice the green area to your right, which is known locally as Monkey Island, probably because it was once the location of a monastery. Continue on the path and, when you reach Cranbrook Wood, keep the woodland on your left.

(4) At the corner, turn left through the wood onto the courtesy footpath. You are now following the line of First World War trenches. Turn right onto ZR 65 as you exit and follow the track until you reach the houses in Callaways Lane.

(5) Turn left into Callaways Lane and follow the road to the right in front of the 14th century timber-framed Newington Manor. Turn right into Bull Lane and, at the historic Bull Inn, right again into the High Street. Take care, the A2 is an extremely busy road. Stay on the pavement at all times.

(6) At Eden Meadow, cross the A2 at the island and follow footpath ZR59 straight ahead into the park. A short diversion downhill to your left takes you to the reconstructed foundations of a 2,000 year old Romano-British temple. Return to continue along the footpath and across the railway line, making sure no trains can be seen or heard. Take footpath ZR55 on the left and follow it until you reach the road. Turning left, you now have the option

Waypoints

- S/F Standard Hill, site of Julius Caesar's encampment**
N 51.352089° / E 0.66781° - alt. 128ft - mi 0
- 1 First World War defences and commemorative beacon**
N 51.347897° / E 0.665361° - alt. 167ft - mi 0.38
- 2 16th/18th century Wormdale Farmhouse**
N 51.342284° / E 0.660629° - alt. 190ft - mi 0.83
- 3 Pre-historic Monkey Island**
N 51.341301° / E 0.667369° - alt. 203ft - mi 1.19
- 4 Cranbrook Wood and First World War defences**
N 51.34588° / E 0.679956° - alt. 200ft - mi 2.03
- 5 18th century Bull Inn**
N 51.34993° / E 0.668596° - alt. 148ft - mi 2.64
- 6 Romano-British temple and 14th century church**
N 51.350635° / E 0.675259° - alt. 102ft - mi 3
- 7 Watercress beds and Libbet stream**
N 51.35593° / E 0.673164° - alt. 59ft - mi 3.49
- 8 Orchards and basket-making**
N 51.371111° / E 0.668908° - alt. 23ft - mi 4.63
- 9 Parsonage Farm and primary school**
N 51.360065° / E 0.666037° - alt. 69ft - mi 5.55
- 10 Historic High Street**
N 51.356301° / E 0.671036° - alt. 72ft - mi 5.93
- S/F Memorial garden**
N 51.351975° / E 0.667814° - alt. 128ft - mi 6.3

of visiting the beautiful medieval St Mary's church and churchyard. Note also the 14th century hall house and the converted oast house next to the church.

(7) Continue past the oast, turn right into Wardwell Lane and, next to Newington Enterprise Centre, turn left along footpath ZR47 into the former watercress beds. Follow the stream then take the footpath uphill. At the gap in the hedge, fork left onto footpath ZR46, keeping the pylon on your right, and go down into Lower Halstow, enjoying views over the Medway Estuary.

(8) Go through the metal gate to the road, turn left, cross the little bridge then immediately left again over the stile onto footpath ZR45. Follow the footpath for about two kilometres along the stream and through the orchards, typical of the fruit-growing that has been such an important part of Newington's economy for years.

(9) At the road, turn left, and follow the road as it turns right and goes past the 17th century Parsonage Farm and the school.

(10) Turn right into Church Lane, past historic houses and cottages until you reach your starting point in High Street. A short walk westwards, towards Rainham, brings you to the village sign and Memorial Garden. **(D/A)**

Practical information

Free parking is available in Newington at the village hall, at the Bull Inn if you are a customer and there is a limited amount of roadside parking. If you start the walk in Lower Halstow, there is limited parking at the Three Tuns if you are a customer and some roadside parking.

There are toilet facilities and free drinking water for customers at the Bull Inn in Newington and at the Three Tuns in Lower Halstow. In spring, summer and autumn you will encounter stinging nettles and brambles so long trousers and closed shoes are advised. In winter, many of the footpaths are extremely muddy, sometimes even flooded. Wear appropriate footwear and you may find a walking pole useful.

There is some road walking. Wear reflective or fluorescent clothing, particularly in dull weather.

In the nearby area

The flint wall on the left of the footpath leading from Bull Lane marks the grounds of Newington Manor, a Grade II* listed 14th century hall house that was used as a prisoner-of-war camp in the Second World War. You can take a short diversion to see the front of the timber-framed house later.

Standard Hill is reputed to be the site of an encampment set up by Julius Caesar on one of his attempted invasions of England (55 and 54 BC). Evidence that Romans lived in this area has been recorded since the 17th century and people sometimes find artefacts when digging in their gardens. Heading towards Sittingbourne, there is an area beside the A2 known as Crockhill (on Keycol Hill) because of the large number of Roman funerary urns found there.

The historic Wormdale Farm has been in the Ledger family for more than 150 years. The large beacon you see marks former First World War trenches and gun emplacements that would have been the last line of inland defence had the Axis powers invaded. The beacon was erected in 2018 by Newington History Group, with the assistance and kind permission of Tom Ledger, to commemorate the centenary of the end of The Great War.

Wormdale Farmhouse dates from the 16th century with 18th century additions. Note where windows have been bricked in to avoid the window tax of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Monkey Island is an unusual outcrop of sandy soil that suggests it was once underwater. The name 'Monkey' is thought to come from the fact that a community of monks once lived in the area. Even religious people were not particularly well-behaved at the time. A group of nuns was moved on after the prioress was strangled in her bed. Seven men were brought in to replace them but four of them murdered a fifth!

Cranbrook Wood is now a peaceful area of woodland coppiced in the traditional way that stretches back thousands of years. But, just over 100 years ago, it was the scene of intense activity as Sappers from the Royal Engineers dug out trenches that would have been fully armed to protect London in the event of an invasion during the First World War.

Newington Manor dates from the 14th century. In the Second World War, it was used to house Italian and German prisoners of war. Older villagers who were children at the time remember visiting them and exchanging sweets. The POWs also proved an attraction for some of the local ladies and a few married and stayed in the village after the war.

The foundations of a Romano-British temple were uncovered during an 18-month archaeological excavation on the site of a new housing development in 2018-2019 and rescued by Newington History Group with the assistance of Peter Cichy from Swale and Thames Archaeological Survey Group. The excavation revealed information that changes completely our knowledge of life in the

area at the time and shows that Newington was on an important trade route with its own pottery-making industry. The wayside temple would have made it a busy stopping off point.

St Mary's church is a beautiful 14th century building on the site of a Norman church, which might itself have replaced a Saxon place of worship. Further information is in the church. Note particularly the artistry of the wall-paintings inside and the sophistication of the layered flint work on the tower outside. Don't miss the shrine of St Robert le Bouser, Newington's very own saint, who was said to be responsible for a number of miracles following his death in the early 14th century. See if you can also find some of the medieval graffiti engraved into the stone-work (Hint: look in the chancel in particular).

The war memorial in the churchyard carries the names of Newington's Fallen in 20th century conflicts. A discrepancy was noted in 2012 between the names on the memorial and those known to have died in the First World War, which led to a major research project by three members of Newington History Group, Dean Coles, Thelma Dudley and Debbie Haigh. They subsequently wrote the stories of the men already named on the war memorial, and their diligent research has gradually discovered more than 20 more who were not on the memorial but whose names and stories are now recorded for posterity. There is a grave maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission behind the church and a headstone, restored by Newington History Group, for another of the Fallen just to the left of the churchyard gate. Most other Fallen rest where they fell.

Church Farm House, a 14th century hall house immediately next door to the church, was once owned by Thomas Linacre, physician to Henry VIII. The converted oast house next to it is one of the few remaining in the area and a reminder that drying hops for brewing was once big business here.

As the footpath alongside Newington Enterprise Centre enters a wide open area, look on the ground to your right and you'll see a stone marked JS. This is almost all that physically remains of the productive watercress beds here, owned by the Simmons family. Watercress was an important part of the local economy in the late 19th and early 20th century, with regular shipments being sent by train to London. Willow rushes grown nearby in the boggy land also provided the raw materials for basket-making.

The footpath from Lower Halstow to Newington takes you through orchards. Fruit-growing has been the mainstay of the local economy for many centuries. St Mary's church was known as the 'Church Among the Orchards' and had an annual Blossom Blessing Ceremony until recently. There's even a cherry called the 'Newington Black'.

The 17th century timber-framed Parsonage Farm was once owned by John Blaxland, one of the earliest and most important pioneers to Australia. He called his land in Sydney 'Newington' after his home village and it subsequently became the site for the 2000 Summer Olympics.

Opposite Parsonage Farm is the village primary school, built on land donated for the benefit of the village and one of the earliest to be set up under 19th century legislation to extend education to all. It has an extension that was opened in 2000 by Anne, Princess Royal.

The upper part of Church Lane dates to Victorian times and is now a conservation area.

The High Street is full of historic buildings, some of which have cellars and foundations dating back nearly 1,000 years. Note particularly the two unusually-shaped buildings at the top of Station Road. There were originally no plans to have a railway station at Newington. But local businessmen, led by the doctor, raised the money to pay for access around 1860 because they wanted a fast, convenient method of getting their produce and products to London. Victorian architects drew up plans for a road lined with impressive mansions but only these two were ever built.

The Bull Inn has been a pub since at least 1745. Although it was not here at the height of the medieval pilgrim movement between London and Canterbury, there is written evidence of other places in Newington where pilgrims could get board and lodging. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, there is reference to an 'ale-stake', a pole that was used to designate a place for refreshments, and other records speak of places where people in search of a miracle from the local saint, Robert le Bouser, could stay.

A little further west is the village sign and Memorial Garden. The garden has a plaque that commemorates the Fallen. More unusually, it also contains soil from First World War Western Front battlefields. The soil was donated as a symbol of peace and friendship by the people of Ypres in 2018, the centenary of the end of the war.

Further details of Newington's fascinating history can be found in *Newington Times Past* by Thelma Dudley and available through Newington History Group's website <https://newingtonhistory.uk>

Let us know your opinion on : <https://www.visorando.co.uk/walk-discovering-2-000-years-of-history-and-n/>



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THE WALKER CODE

Visorando

by Visorando

Before the walk



CHOOSE YOUR WALK CAREFULLY

by matching its difficulty and duration to your skill and physical ability.



CHECK THE WEATHER FORECAST

and look for other important information, such as snow, temperature, tide times, wind speed, fire risk etc.



BE PROPERLY PREPARED

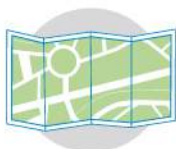
by taking suitable equipment with you, such as a whistle, first-aid kit, appropriate clothing and something to eat and drink.



LET SOMEONE KNOW

where you will be walking.

During the walk



STAY ON THE PATH

(unless you have an exceptionally good reason not to).



RESPECT THE COUNTRYSIDE

by not damaging fences, fields and crops and not picking fruit or vegetables.



RESPECT LOCAL RESTRICTIONS

such as bans on fires, barbecues, camping, fishing, swimming etc.



LEAVE GATES AS YOU FIND THEM

and be cautious of farm animals: try to go around, not through, herds or flocks.



TAKE YOUR RUBBISH HOME

and do not leave any trace of your journey except your footprints.



DON'T MAKE LOTS OF NOISE

and do be respectful and courteous to people along the route.



KEEP YOUR DOG ON A LEAD

and keep it close to you when you meet other people. Make sure you can call it back to you at any time. Walking with a dog is not recommended on routes where there are farm animals.



THE COUNTRYSIDE IS A LIVING ENVIRONMENT

that changes all the time. Walking is an adventure and there are risks associated with it. Be responsible, and know when it is better to give up and turn around than get into danger.

Whether it is private or public, the land you walk on does not belong to you. In particular, the owners of private land have generously and graciously given you permission to cross their property.

If you have an accident, please do not sue the owners of the place where it happened, because other walkers might be banned from that route. However, please feel free to tell us about any dangers you find.