

This walk is adapted by Sonia Overall from the Royal Geographical Society Discovering Britain trail of Sandwich.

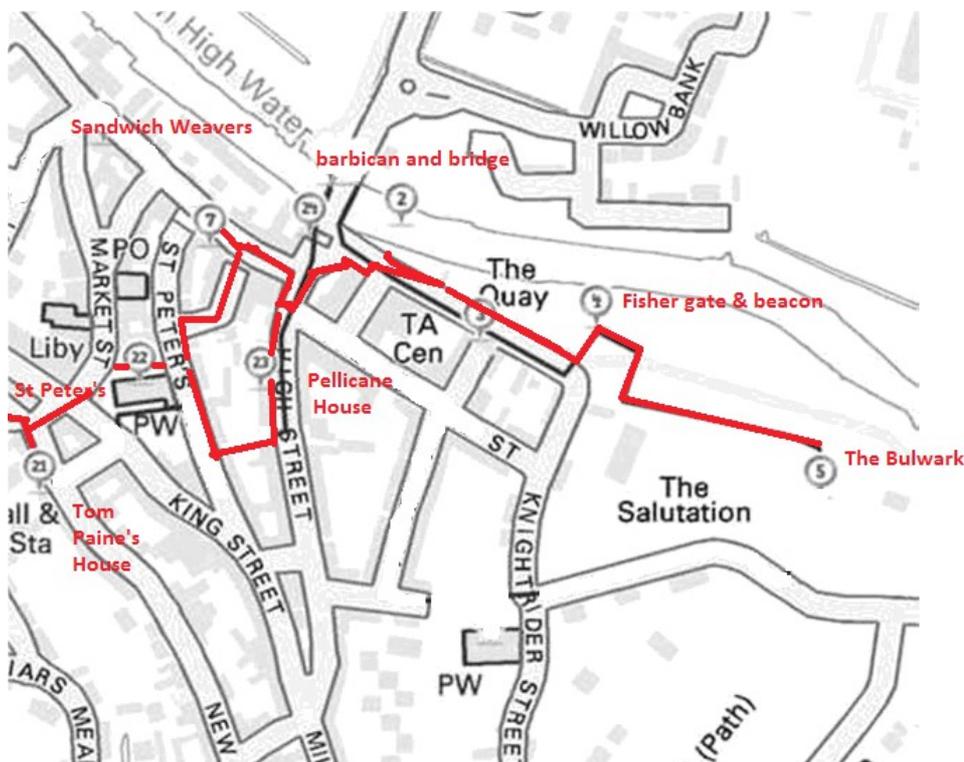
The full trail and audio guide can be downloaded from the RGS project website www.discoveringbritain.org

The text is that of the RGS trail (with minor adaptations) but the route has been reduced and adapted to be as accessible as possible, given the narrow streets and uneven pavements of the town.

Start & Finish – Guildhall forecourt. Walk approximately 1 hour.

Stops: (RGS trail numbering)

21. Thomas Paine’s Cottage, 20 New Street
22. St Peter’s Church, Market Street
7. Sandwich Weavers, 15 Strand Street
24. The Barbican / Davis Gate
2. View of the River Stour and The Quay from the bridge
3. The Fisher Gate, The Quay
4. Sandwich Millennium beacon
5. The Bulwark
23. Pellicane House, 22 High Street



21. Thomas Paine's Cottage, 20 New Street

This small house once belonged to the writer and political activist Thomas Paine. In 1759 he set up a tailor's shop here that specialised in making corsets. Paine emigrated in pursuit of a better living, first to France and then America. His writing career there inspired the American Independence movement and he created the phrase 'United States of America'.

Retrace to the zebra crossing and cross here. Wheelchairs will need to go a **short distance in the road** to reach St Peter's church.

22. St Peter's Church

St Peter's sounded the curfew bell at eight o'clock each night (a tradition that continues to this day). All fires in the town had to be extinguished then - a vital precaution when most of the buildings were flammable timber-framed houses. St Peter's also offered protection during the Plague. The Plague or 'Black Death' was one of the worst pandemics in history. It started in China then swept across Europe in 1348 though outbreaks continued for over 300 years. The disease was spread by fleas which lived on rats. Since rats often hid on ships, plague spread rapidly in port towns. Sandwich was hit by several outbreaks. In 1564 infected people were quarantined inside St Peter's to stop the disease spreading.

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

Up St Peter's Street, into Three Kings Yard. Turn left into Strand Street.

7. Sandwich Weavers building, 15 Strand Street

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

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

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

The Sandwich Weavers building is named after Dutch migrants who settled here in the sixteenth century, although the building itself is much older. When Sandwich was at the height of its prosperity, this building was the part of The Bull Inn. Merchants, sailors and townspeople who met here would

have been able to glimpse ships in the river – such as the 200 cargoes of grain that left the quay in 1305 or the large Genoese vessels that were finding it more difficult to use the Wantsum Channel.

Right along Strand Street. Cross the road to the Bell Hotel, then again to the quayside walkway and bridge.

Wheelchairs: right after the Bell Hotel; cross road at dropped curve and **short distance in road** to toilets. Sloped access to quayside walkway.

24. The Barbican, Ramsgate Road / The Quay

This arch is The Barbican or Davis Gate, another of Sandwich's medieval gates. It was built in the fourteenth century as part of the town's defences. From 1759 until 1977 it was used to collect tolls from travellers crossing the bridge. There is still a board on the inside wall listing the toll charges. These tolls became a major source of income for the town, especially from the late Victorian era when Sandwich's preserved medieval streets became a visitor attraction.

Sandwich railway station opened in 1847 and a new influx of visitors brought a degree of prosperity to the town. The amount of toll money collected funded the rebuilding of the bridge in 1892.

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

Another reason visitor numbers increased from the Victorian era onwards was a new leisure activity: golf. Sandwich is home to three world-class golf courses including Royal St George's which opened in 1887. Interestingly the golf courses developed thanks to the physical processes that shrank the port. The courses are on coastal land that was created by centuries of sediment deposition. This is yet another example of Sandwich using its changing physical geography for economic gain.

2. View of the River Stour & The Quay from the bridge

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

Thanet was once an island. It was separated from mainland Kent by a strait called the Wantsum Channel. This 600-metre-wide channel was a major shipping route connecting the English Channel with the Thames Estuary. Sandwich was once located on a sand bank south of the Isle of Thanet where the River Stour flowed into the Wantsum Channel. This location is thought to be the origin of the town's name: 'Sandwich' derives from the Saxon for 'sandy place'. In the tenth century the town relocated to the higher ground where it stands today. The direction of the prevailing winds along the Wantsum Channel made Sandwich a natural place for ships to shelter. When a port developed here it became known as the Sandwich Haven.

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

Follow the sloped walkway and path along the river's edge to the beacon.

3. Fisher Gate (opposite car park)

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

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

The medieval quay would have been a busy place lined with ships and bustling with people. Tradesmen like coopers would have used this gate on a daily basis. Coopers were skilled craftsmen who made barrels, a vital trade in a medieval port. Barrels were the best way of transporting goods by sea including wine, beer, spices and salted fish. Goods would have made their way through this gate as well. For example pack horses carried sacks of raw Kentish wool through here to be shipped to Flanders. Imported goods were taken through the Fisher Gate too. Wine from France, fruit from across Europe, timber from the Baltic were unloaded at The Quay and carried through here into the town.

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

4. Sandwich Millenium Beacon

This beacon was built to mark the Millennium. It also marks the former entrance to Sandwich port. During the town's medieval heyday the River Stour was much wider and covered part of the grassy area we are now on. Notice the coat of arms on the beacon. The red and blue shield is the emblem of the Cinque Ports. Formed around 1050, the original Cinque Ports were Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich ('cinque' is the French for 'five'). These ports on England's south coast played a special role in medieval England. England did not have a Navy until the reign of Henry the VII. Before then the Cinque Ports provided the king with men and ships for fifteen days each year and during times of war. In return these ports got special royal privileges such as tax exemptions, salvage rights and their own law courts. The Cinque Port court sessions were held in the Guildhall.

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

Continue along the park path to just above the play area.

5. The Bulwark

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

From the thirteenth century Sandwich was attacked several times by the French. King Richard II was so worried about Sandwich that in 1385 he ordered extra walls to be built around parts of the town. Stone was costly to transport so most of these walls were earthen ramparts topped by wooden palisades. These raised earthworks still survive today and you can follow long stretches of them around the town.

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

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

[Retrace route back to Bell Hotel, cross the road to the Admiral Owen and continue along the High Street.](#)

23. Pellicane House, 22 High Street

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

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

By the sixteenth century the High Street had replaced The Quay as the town's business centre. This shift illustrates Sandwich's decline after its medieval prosperity. When the Wantsum Channel and Sandwich Haven silted up, large ships could no longer travel to the quayside. Trade shifted to the nearby coastal towns of Dover and Deal which could cope with large numbers of naval and merchant vessels. Furthermore, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries from 1536. This meant that the monks who owned Sandwich had to surrender their land and property to the king. Henry also suppressed religious hospitals and Thomas Becket's shrine was destroyed on his orders.

Once Sandwich lost both its port and its pilgrims it became isolated. The processes that caused the port to decline left the medieval town behind. Sandwich did not grow dramatically thereafter.

[Squeeze into Holy Ghost Alley \(just wide enough for wheelchair\) to come back to St Peter's Street. Retrace route \(past the Old Gaol\) to St Peter's Church and the Guildhall.](#)