

Burham Community Trail

Downland Walk

The shorter downland walk takes you from the centre of the village, up the gently sloping foot of the downs, and through Burham Down Nature Reserve, managed by Kent Wildlife Trust. The disused quarries, chalk grassland, scrub and woodland of Burham Downs provide an ideal habitat for a diverse range of plants and wildlife, and for this reason the Reserve is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Rare orchids flourish on the chalk grassland of the downs, including the pyramidal orchid with its beautiful shades of pink; the less conspicuous man orchid, named because its flowers resemble little men; and the equally curious bee orchid, also named for its flower.



Yellowhammers nest amongst the scrubland trees and bushes at Burham Down, but may be seen feeding on open areas of grassland.



Common blue

The scrub area is a valuable home for a variety of creatures, including dormice, adders and slow worms, as well as many birds. The trees and bushes here, such as willow, dogwood and hazel, provide nesting sites for willow warblers and black caps, yellowhammers and linnets.

Scrub and woodland create a habitat for nightingales, in decline in this country, but happily a large colony thrives on Burham Downs. Their beautiful song can be heard over the village from mid-April to mid-summer.

You might choose to continue your walk, taking the strenuous and steep climb to the top of the downs to meet the North Downs Way running along Common Road. Here you can rest and take in the breathtaking panorama of the Medway valley from Blue Bell Hill picnic site.

Burham Down is an excellent site for butterflies, including the vivid common blue and the paler and more scarce chalkhill blue. The rare silver-spotted skipper was successfully re-introduced here in 1998.



Pyramidal orchid



Man orchid



Bee orchid

Marsh mallow



River Walk

This short walk out from the village takes you past the Bronze Age site adjacent to Margetts Pit. The area is now covered by a lagoon for run-off water from the pit which is due to be completely in-filled by 2012. In 2009 archaeologists uncovered evidence of both Neolithic and Iron Age enclosures. They also found evidence of shale bracelets which show trading links to areas as far away as Dorset.

Continuing towards the Old Church you pass Burham Court. Part of this house dates back to the 16th century – there are still some examples of wattle and daub to be seen in internal walls which were previously external. Like many other such properties the house has had a chequered history and is now a lovingly restored family home.

The disused church of St Mary the Virgin is sited where the original village of Burham would have been. The earliest parts are Norman but parts have been added and others removed over the centuries. As the village grew and moved away from the river, people wanted a church in a more convenient location. A new church was built in the village in the 1880s, but has now been demolished, due to problems with its foundations.

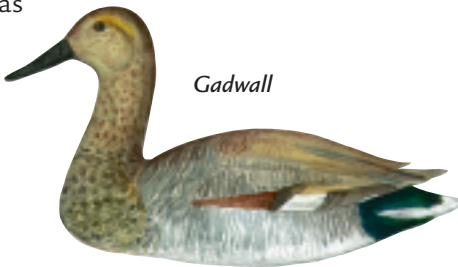
The old Ferry Crossing point near the church was used during medieval times by pilgrims following the Pilgrims Way to Canterbury.

The route takes you along the river and around Burham Marsh which forms part of a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its valuable grassland and tidal reedbed habitats. It is managed by Kent Wildlife Trust.

Geese and ducks such as gadwall and shoveller duck congregate on the grassland and herons can be seen fishing in the dykes.

The reedbeds provide a habitat for birds such as reed and sedge warbler and water rail. Species which over-winter here are reed bunting, snipe, redshank and the elusive bittern.

Along the river you might be lucky enough to glimpse the electric-blue flash of a kingfisher, or, in summer, hear a burst of song from the ` warbler.



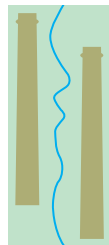
Gadwall

© Crown copyright reserved, Kent County Council licence number 100019238, June 2010



1820s Beginnings of Burham's industrialisation. Lime burning works established at Burham Court Farm, where land is described as 'an inexhaustible mine of the chalk esteemed the most valuable for making lime.'

1901 Burham's population increases to a maximum of 1725, having grown from only 380 villagers before the advent of the cement and brick industry. Today around 1,300 people live in Burham.



This trail is part of the Valley of Visions Community Trails project, encouraging people to enjoy, explore and learn about their local area and surrounding countryside. Why not explore one of the other community trails in the Medway Gap? Visit www.valleyofvisions.org.uk for further information.

For more information about Burham visit www.burhamvillage.com

You can find out more about Burham Downs and Burham Marsh Nature Reserves at www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk

Much information in this leaflet has been gathered from *The Medway Valley: a Kent Landscape Transformed* by Andrew Hann.



Memories of Burham life

There was no electricity in the village before 1936 and the streets were lit by gas lamps. The lamplighter lived at 269 Rochester Road.

One night two young men went out to Street Farm to steal swede which then cost 2d each. Times were bad and they needed food, so used to steal and poach whenever they could. They filled their sack and on their way home stopped at the war memorial gates where there was a gaslight. They looked into the sack at their haul, only to find that instead of swede they had stolen mangold-wurzel (cattle feed). Disappointed, they dumped the sack over the church wall, to be found by the vicar the next morning. The now elderly gentleman who told me this tale with a grin on his face was one of the young thieves. They were so poor and had no food, they had to take risks.



Before the second world war fish cost 2d and chips were 1d.



There were two fish and chip shops in Baker Street. Mr and Mrs Turner used their front room as a fish and chip shop. Then they bought the Cream House and sold groceries as well as fish and chips.

Workers at the brick factory were allowed to draw their wages before pay day, usually for beer. There was even a token given out to spend in the ale houses.

Times were tough after the war, but poaching was frowned upon by the landowners. If you poached a rabbit which was worth 6d you were fined 10 shillings. This same gentleman told me that his father took a fallen tree for firewood from the woods, and was fined 10 shillings, but luckily the wood he sold gave him a profit.

Rising costs – a house in Rochester Road cost £400 in 1955 and has just had a new front door. The door cost £810!

About Burham



The village of Burham lies at the foot of the Kent Downs and beside the River Medway in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This special position in the Medway Valley has shaped the village over centuries as a place of both farming and industry. Over 3,000 years ago people settled here using the fertile bank to grow crops, and the downs for animal grazing; later Bronze and Iron Age peoples manufactured shale bracelets here; 19th-century Burham saw dramatic change, with the establishment of the brick and cement works. But throughout its existence, Burham has also continued to be an agricultural area.

Farming

Until the mid-19th century the parish of Burham was held between a few landowners. The holder of the largest share was the Earl of Aylesford who, with the passing of the Enclosures Act in 1813, was able to secure Burham Common for his own use, rather than for the use of the villagers. He combined this with some of his other land to create Street Farm.

What remains of Street Farm (now only 80 acres) is run as a riding stables. It is on the opposite side of the road from where the farmstead, with its large pond and surrounding orchards, was sited.

There is no working farm based in Burham today, but the land is worked by farmland tenants who live in Wouldham and Aylesford.

In the early 19th century much of the natural woodland and scrub covering the top of the downs was cleared for agriculture. New woodlands of chestnut and ash were coppiced to produce hop poles, which were in demand in the Medway Valley.

Industry

In 1852 Burham became the site of the most advanced brickworks in the world, producing up to 30 million bricks per year! The Burham Brick, Lime and Cement Company was founded by Thomas Cubitt, architect of Queen Victoria's Osborne House.

Although the bricks were made entirely by machine, the company employed up to 700 men and boys, including local agricultural workers who had previously relied on casual seasonal work. Skilled positions such as that of foreman and manager were usually filled by Londoners. Some workers travelled from as far as Maidstone. Landowners limited the building of workers' housing in Burham itself, but dwellings were built on land nearby, developing the settlement of Eccles, then by the 1880s workers' houses were also built in Burham.

The Burham Brick, Lime and Cement Company appears to have been quite self-sufficient – expansion into barge-building and engineering created transport for its products and produced the machinery for brick and cement manufacture. Formerly a quiet rural village, Burham must have been transformed into a hive of industry. It had a busy wharf and quay; tramways ran between the chalk quarries and the works; it seems that everything ran like clockwork and it was praised as being a “model brickworks”.

Rose Villa was built for the first works manager, William Varney. Built of flint and chalk, its remnants could still be seen in the 1980s. Its water wheel is now in Brenchley Gardens, Maidstone.

1100-700BC Bronze and Iron Age people settle here, on a site established by earlier Neolithic settlers – the first farmers. The late Bronze Age brings the beginnings of industry to Burham.

AD 43 Battle of the Medway takes place at Burham. British tribes led by King Caractacus fail to halt the Roman advance, significantly affecting the course of English history and leading to the Roman occupation.

1066 Burham belongs to Leofwine, brother of Harold II, who was also killed at the Battle of Hastings. In the 1086 Domesday Book it is listed as having two major farms, a church, a mill, and woodland sufficient to feed 20 hogs.

1400s Pilgrims on their way to Canterbury cross the Medway here, possibly using Burham church, and Snodland church on the opposite bank, for shelter. Both have similar towers built at this time, probably paid for by the pilgrims.



COMMUNITY TRAILS
IN THE MEDWAY GAP
Burham

