



'Walking in the footsteps of Dickens'

Always follow current UK government guidelines for COVID-19 (www.gov.uk/coronavirus) when enjoying these walks and check the most up to date advice before setting off.

The North Kent Marshes were a popular stomping ground of Charles Dickens, as a result of their proximity to his country home at Gads Hill Place in Higham.

Dickens sought inspiration in his surroundings, and set the opening scene of *Great Expectations* in the graveyard of St James' in Cooling, whilst his daughter was married at nearby St Mary's in Higham.

These churches are now in our care and this 11.5 mile walk visits both, whilst exploring the surrounding landscape.



Route:

Start

Starting from Higham station (Higham, Rochester ME3 7QJ), walk up the drive and cross over the railway to the right, walking up past The Railway pub.

At the corner, follow brown tourist church signs to take Church Street straight on northwards.

Continue for roughly a mile, slowly descend in though an unfenced section between fields, eventually arriving at a small hamlet with St Mary's Church through a lychgate on your left.

Church 1: St Mary's Church, Higham

Cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust, the church was originally Norman, and remodelled and enlarged in the 14th-century. Charles Dickens' daughter Kate married the painter Charles Allston Collins - brother of writer Wilkie Collins - at the church in 1860.

Having taken time to explore around the churchyard, come back out through lychgate and take the lane left towards a gate and stile at the end of the churchyard.

Cross through into the fields, following the arrows to take the path diagonally across to a level crossing, to cross the railway, taking care to obey instructions while crossing.

At a gateway, fork left following the arrow marked NS138, and continuing across the field, passing beneath two sets of power lines and taking the stile at the far end of the field.

After the stile, fork left again, following the path alongside a lake, before emerging eventually and mounting a dyke, turning slightly left and continuing towards the Thames.

When you reach a T-junction of paths near the river, turn right and joining the Saxon Shore Way along the raised dyke along the riverside, through a metal foot gate and past signs warning of erosion until you reach some decaying wooden jetties and Cliffe Fort, a decaying military fort built in the 1860s as part of naval defenses in the area, used in both World War I and as an anti-aircraft battery in World War II.

Skirt around the Fort and continue to follow the path through gravel extraction workings site along Cliffe Creek, eventually reaching a track and turning left then right, keeping with the Saxon Shore Way all the way to another junction, where signs indicate you should once more turn left and continue to follow the Saxon Shore Way.

From here, the Saxon Shore Way will take you all the way to Cooling, through the village of Cliffe. Here, you might consider breaking your walk at St Helen's Church.

Break at Church 2- St Helen's Church

Once finished with your break take Swingate Avenue left and follow it all the way to the end, before continuing along the path to the side of Rookery Lodge and across the fields.

When you reach Common Lane, turn right, and join it briefly, before reaching a corner and following Saxon Shore Way signs to turn left. Sticking with this path, you should soon arrive on Cooling Road, and follow it into the village, passing the impressive gatehouse Cooling Castle.

Continuing along the lane, you will come to St James' Church, built in the 13th century and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust since 1978.

Church 3 - St James' Church, Cooling.

The church is famous as the inspiration for Charles Dickens' Great Expectations, which saw the orphan Pip meet Magwitch the convict in the graveyard.

Take time to explore the outside of the church and once done, turn right, following footpath signs at a triangular patch of grass and take a track up the hill until crossing a bridge over the railway.

After this, follow the track as it bears left then take the steps on your right, following the path in a straight line to the left of a hedge until you meet Wymborne's Way permissive bridleway.

Take this right and continue down the hill, turning right when you meet a lane by New Barns Farm, and following the lane until it meets "Cooling Street (Splendiff)". Follow Cooling Street left and when you enter the hamlet of Splendiff follow the rough lane straight on between two rows of houses.

At the end you will find a pair of green and yellow footpath signs. Take the path right (marked RS 56) and follow this to the hamlet of Cooling Street.

Turn left again on a tarmac lane, and then at a wooden fingerpost take the path diagonally across the field through two gates, eventually rejoining the lane, and turning right. Follow this lane ("Cooling Common"), continuing when it becomes "Merryboys Road".

You will eventually emerge onto the B2000. At this point, on the opposite side of the road to the left you should see a "Public Footpath" sign.

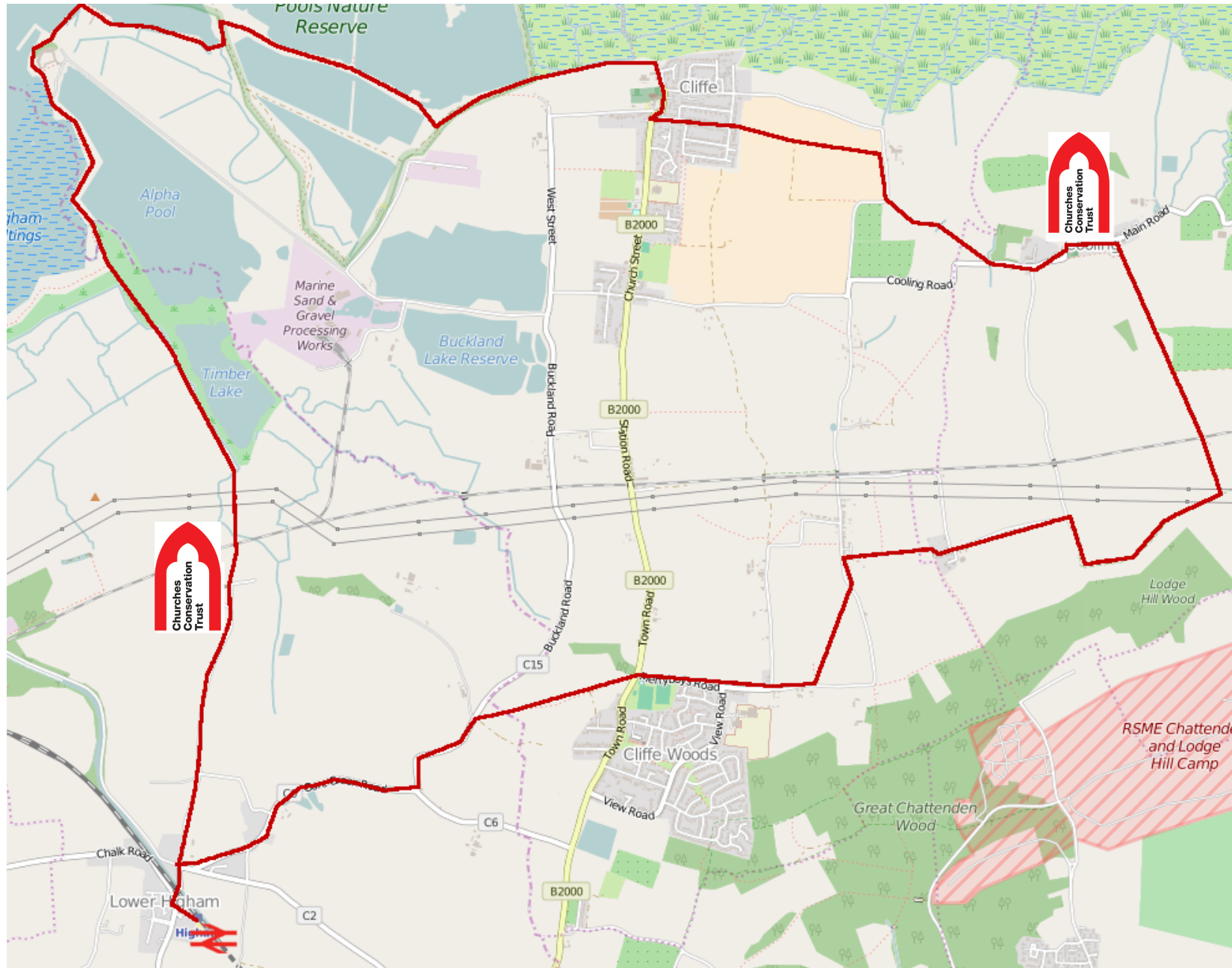
Stick with this path until eventually you come to Buckland Road, turning left and continuing along the road until you reach a Tjunction, following signs right to Higham and Gravesend, taking Gore Green Road.

You are now on the home stretch, keeping with Gore Green Road all the way back into Higham, following signs marked "Higham" and a cycle route to Gravesend when you meet Lower Rochester Road.

Bear left back towards the station to complete your route.

End of route

Map



© OpenStreetMap

All of CCT's resources are free, but as a registered charity we rely on donations and are grateful for any support to care for this national heritage for the enjoyment of all. If you enjoyed this walk, please consider donating to CCT at [visitchurches.org.uk/donate](https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/donate)