

*With links to William the Conqueror's half brother Odo, St Mary the Virgin church at Nettlestead is renowned for its 15th century stained glass windows.*

**4** Exit the churchyard. Cross the road then turn right and walk along the pavement. Cross over Gibbs Hill and after approximately 25 metres the footpath on the left leads you away from the road so you walk between hedgerows with houses on your right hand side.

**5** Continue straight on. Eventually through metal railings the path comes out among the houses. Turn immediately left between more metal railings and walk slightly uphill and on through the fields.

*Enjoy the stunning views to your right down over the Medway Valley.*

**6** Approximately 50 metres before reaching a house you'll see a footpath to your right which leads you down through a field. At the bottom of the field turn right and walk towards the houses. The footpath becomes the pavement beside the road again. Turn left and follow the pavement for about 500 metres.

**7** At the bend across the road you'll see Wateringbury train station. You can finish your walk here perhaps with a beverage in the neighbouring Railway Public House. Alternatively you can continue along the riverside path with the river on your right hand side, past Bow Bridge Marina and towards Teston following the Teston River Walk.

**Distance:** 1.8 miles / 3km. Can be extended for another 2.9 miles / 4.7km via the Teston River Walk.

**Time:** 1 hour approximately (2 hours with extension).

**Terrain:** These paths can become very muddy. Two train line crossings. Four stiles through the orchards and some gates.

**Start/end point:** Wateringbury train station.

**OS Explorer Map:** 148.

# the River & Yew

## Wateringbury

A 1.8 mile / 3km circular walk (with optional 2.9 mile / 4.7km extension) from Wateringbury train station through the delightful countryside of Nettlestead.



*River in snow (George Pearson)*



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This walk is endorsed by Explore Kent.

*Photo credits cover: St Mary the Virgin Church (Medway Valley Countryside Partnership – MVCP) Mist and Moorings (George Pearson), Kingfisher (Andy Vidler www.andyvidler.co.uk)*



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This short walk goes along the banks of the River Medway and through the delightful surrounding countryside of Nettlestead. It's a relatively short walk but can be extended by linking to the Teston River Walk which is an additional 2.9 miles / 4.7km.

- 1 Turn left out of the station and immediately left again to cross the train tracks and you'll be beside the River Medway. With Bow Bridge in front of you turn right and take the lower path by the river.

The name Wateringbury is thought to derive from the [Saxon] word 'Wotringberia' meaning 'a low and watery site' and indeed the industry in the village established due to its location along the main River Medway. A brewery was established here in 1820 where Jude Handbury and Co later blended whisky in 1860. Wateringbury stream also flows into the Medway just above Bow Bridge and this stream once powered several water mills.

- 2 Begin walking along the River Medway path with the river on your left. At the end of the moored boats the path enters and meanders through riverside trees. Continue along the path through the trees for about 1km.

Men known as hufflers were used in this location to pull barges along the Medway. This was a hard job as fences went right down to the river edge in places and the hufflers had to clamber over them to continue along their route. Pulling a barge from Maidstone to Yalding, a distance of around 8 miles, would take an entire day and a huffler was usually paid one pound for a days labour! Hufflers were used until the 1880s even though towpaths for horses were introduced in the 1830s.

While strolling along, peer through the trees at the river and keep your eyes peeled for a kingfisher or if you're really lucky an otter. Otter numbers are thankfully increasing in this area and they have been spotted in the River Medway along this stretch.

- 3 After walking for about 10 minutes you'll see a footpath on your right hand side. Take this path carefully crossing the railway line and follow the fence. You'll see Nettlestead Place on your left hand side.

Nettlestead Place was mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086). It was refurbished and enlarged in 1921/22. Since 1988, the gardens have been redeveloped and extended and garden walks are available.

Continuing straight on following the path past some impressive old yew trees and into the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin in Nettlestead.



Yew berries (Andy Vidler)



Orchard (MVCP)



Boats (MVCP)

The yew has the ability to form new trunks and growth from old branches and so it was held as sacred by Druids in pre-Christian times as a symbol of death and resurrection. Since many parts of the tree including its berries are poisonous, this is another symbol of death and this connection has linked the trees to churchyards in Christian times too. Ancient yew trees are still found within many churchyards today.

