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Great Stour Way

A linear cycle route along the River Great Stour

3 miles (4.8km) allow 30 minutes

Running between Canterbury and Chartham this 3 mile long traffic free multi-user route following National Cycle Route 18 provides a beautiful and tranquil journey along the banks of the River Stour.



Enjoy cycling through heritage sites like Milton church whilst passing across the river taking in the views.

How to get there -

By Car: Via A28 Station Road.

Parking: Paid parking is available at Chartham Village Hall.

Train: Nearest station: Chartham Station (0.2 miles) National Rail Enquiries: 03457 484950

Bus: Canterbury Bus Station. Traveline: 0871 200 22 33

S	Start	Tumbling Bay
///	what3words	///putts.awestruck.section
F	Finish	Whitehall Meadows
///	what3words	///plus.crush.mouse
🚧	Gates	1
🚧	Stiles	0
📏	Steps	0
🏔️	Terrain	Surfaced paths.
🌅	Views	Some excellent views.
☕	Refreshments	At The Artichoke Pub

Route Description

1. Tumbling Bay is an old local name for this point where the artificial mill channel joins the Great Stour. Older Chartham residents relate a story of a local boy called Faulkner who rescued a friend from drowning here. He was given a bravery award by the Scouts. You may have noticed a barrier structure along the bank. It was constructed by volunteers from the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership to prevent erosion.
2. At Horton, across the river, six Anglo-Saxon graves and traces of a building were discovered in 2001. The people who lived (and died) here knew this place as Horatun – the muddy farmstead. Their dwelling stood just 200m from the present manor house, which is late 15th century. To the rear and left of the house you might be able to glimpse at the bellcot of the 13th century chapel – it is one of the few twin arch bellcots in Britain. The lakes close to this section of the river are an industrial legacy. They date from the earliest phase of gravel quarrying here after WWII (see The Importance of Gravel).
3. Take a short diversion along the footpath here to see the earliest and latest chapters in the story of this tiny settlement. The story starts with St John's Church. It dates from the 13th century, when the manor was held by Sir Robert de Septvans. To get to it you walk through the most recent chapter - an aggregate processing site. Milton never really grew beyond its origins as a farm with a mill (Old English – myln ton). In 1588 12 people were taking communion at the church, in 1640 it was 10. By the 1980s, when the church became disused, there were just 6.



4. Those who regularly pass this way say this is the best place to see kingfishers along this part of the Great Stour. If any bird has earned its name, it's this one. They hunt by diving into the water from riverside perches. No easy feat as the fish are small and constantly moving, and the bird has to assess their depth and account for the refraction of the water. On top of that, its eyes are closed as it hits the surface! The presence of kingfishers is a sign of a healthy river – polluted waters do not support enough small fish to feed them.
5. Thanington Lakes is home to an array of fauna and flora, tranquil, restful, visually appealing...and completely man-made. Yes, these watery wildlife hotspots are about as natural as the A28 that rumbles past them. And the same goes for all the other lakes you will see along the Great Stour Way. They are the product of industry – disused gravel pits (see The Importance of Gravel below).

But just look what nature has done with these man-made foundations! Gaze across the tranquil waters and you might see tufted duck and great-crested grebe. The lake margins are a profusion of wild flowering plants including purple loosestrife and fleabane. Reed warblers nest in the reed fringes. Whirlygig beetles dance on the water, while dragonflies hawk overhead. There are many lakeside willows, and look out for some dead trees which are just as important for wildlife as living ones.

6. In the 15th century, property development wasn't about location, location, location, it was about crenelation, crenelation, crenelation! This was when wealthy landowners put battlements on their manor houses to make them look like castles. That's exactly what Sir Thomas Browne of nearby Tonford Manor did in 1449. To be fair, his extravagance did pay off, because Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon stayed there in 1512. Traces of these fortifications can still be seen today.
7. By anyone's standards, Thanington has been around for a while – an Anglo-Saxon reference to Thenningden dates from AD791! Across the Great Stour you can see the Medieval heart of the Parish – the Court Lodge Farm and the Church. There's a theory that this was the country churchyard about which Thomas Gray's famous Elegy was written...but it is just a theory.

The Manor of Thanington has been owned by many wealthy families, who can be traced right back to Domesday. In the 16th century tragedy struck one of these families – the Hales. Eldest son James was imprisoned and tortured on the orders of Mary Tudor. On his release he returned to Thanington, but drowned himself in the Great Stour soon after.

8. Common lizards love to bask on this bank of earth that crosses the marshes, but it wasn't put here for them. It is the embankment of a long lost railway, the Elham Valley Line. It branched off the mainline here, curving across Hambrook, the Great Stour, and then Wincheap Meadows, before heading on its way to Folkestone. Read the information panel to find out more. Looking across the river to Wincheap Meadows, you can see the land is much less open than Hambrook Marshes. Trees and scrub have crept in over the years because, unlike Hambrook, these fields are not grazed and the meadow plants have slowly disappeared.



The Countryside Code

Respect everyone

- be considerate to other users.
- leave gates and property as you find them.
- be nice, say hello, share the space.
- follow signs and keep to marked paths.

Protect the environment

- take your litter home.
- do not light fires and only light BBQs where signs say you can.
- always keep dogs under control.
- dog poo - bag it and bin it.
- care for nature - do not disturb wildlife.

Enjoy the outdoors

- check your route and local conditions.
- plan your adventure and be prepared.
- enjoy your visit and have fun!

www.gov.uk/countryside-code

Find more walks at explorekent.org or download the Kent Connected App.

- 9.** Hambrook Marshes are named after the last farmer to own them, in the 1930s. He grazed his cattle here and every day walked them across a ford in the Great Stour, and up Cow Lane (where else?) to his dairy in nearby Wincheap.

In 1950 the marshes were sold to the Brett Group, a local quarrying company. But it wasn't until 1979 that the quarry machines moved in. Quarrying lasted just six years, then the pits were filled in and the land restored to grassland.

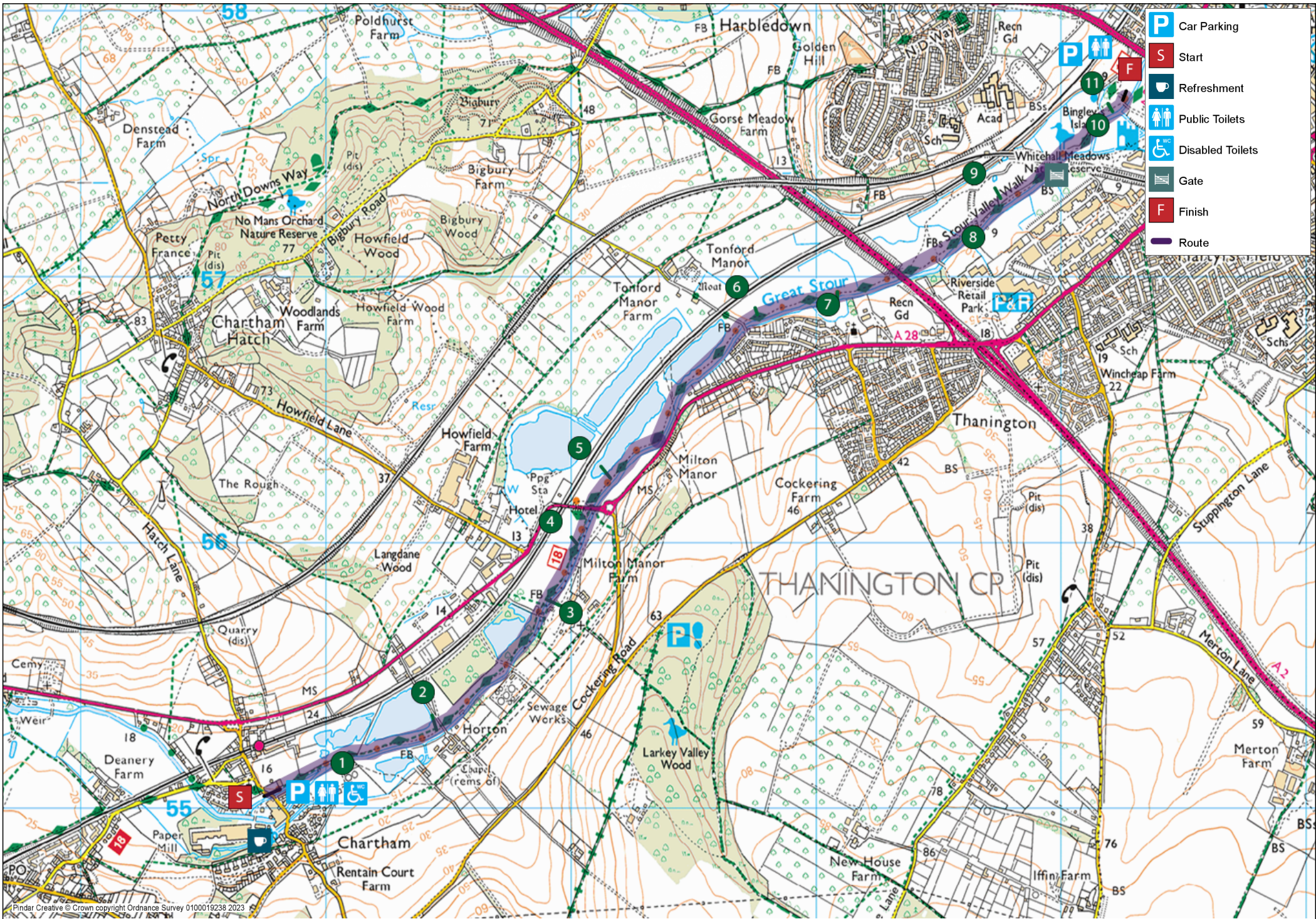
In 2004 the marshes were sold again, this time to a charity called the Kent Enterprise Trust. They engage a diverse range of groups and individuals in improving the land, through conservation work and other practical projects. They have done much to protect and enhance habitats on the marshes. The wet grassland is maintained by low intensity grazing. It floods in winter, providing habitats for migratory birds, and shallow 'scrapes' have been created to hold water for them.

As you walk through Hambrook, you will see a number of information panels that will tell you more about its history and wildlife.

- 10.** Look across the Great Stour from Whitehall Meadow and you will see the tall vegetation and willow scrub of Bingley's Island. So who was Mr. Bingley and why did he have an island named after him? In fact there never was a Mr. Bingley. The name comes from an Old English name recorded in 814 - binnan ea, which means 'within a river'. The island is now a Local Nature Reserve.

- 11.** If the Victorian artist Sydney Cooper could see Canterbury today he would surely be astounded at how much it had changed since he created his paintings of the Great Stour. But here at Whitehall Meadow he would perhaps feel that something of that pastoral idyll still remained.

In Cooper's time there were numerous wet meadows like Whitehall in the Stour Valley. The 20th century wasn't kind to them and many were lost to agricultural drainage and gravel extraction. Whitehall escaped these changes and is today a Local Nature Reserve, managed in the traditional way by annual mowing and grazing. A range of plants that like damp conditions do well here, including the locally scarce brown sedge. In winter, visitors can enjoy flocks of teal, snipe and lapwing, that flock here because the meadow is allowed to flood – another bit of traditional management that we think Mr. Cooper would approve of.



- P Car Parking
- S Start
- ☕ Refreshment
- 🚻 Public Toilets
- ♿ Disabled Toilets
- ⚡ Gate
- F Finish
- Route