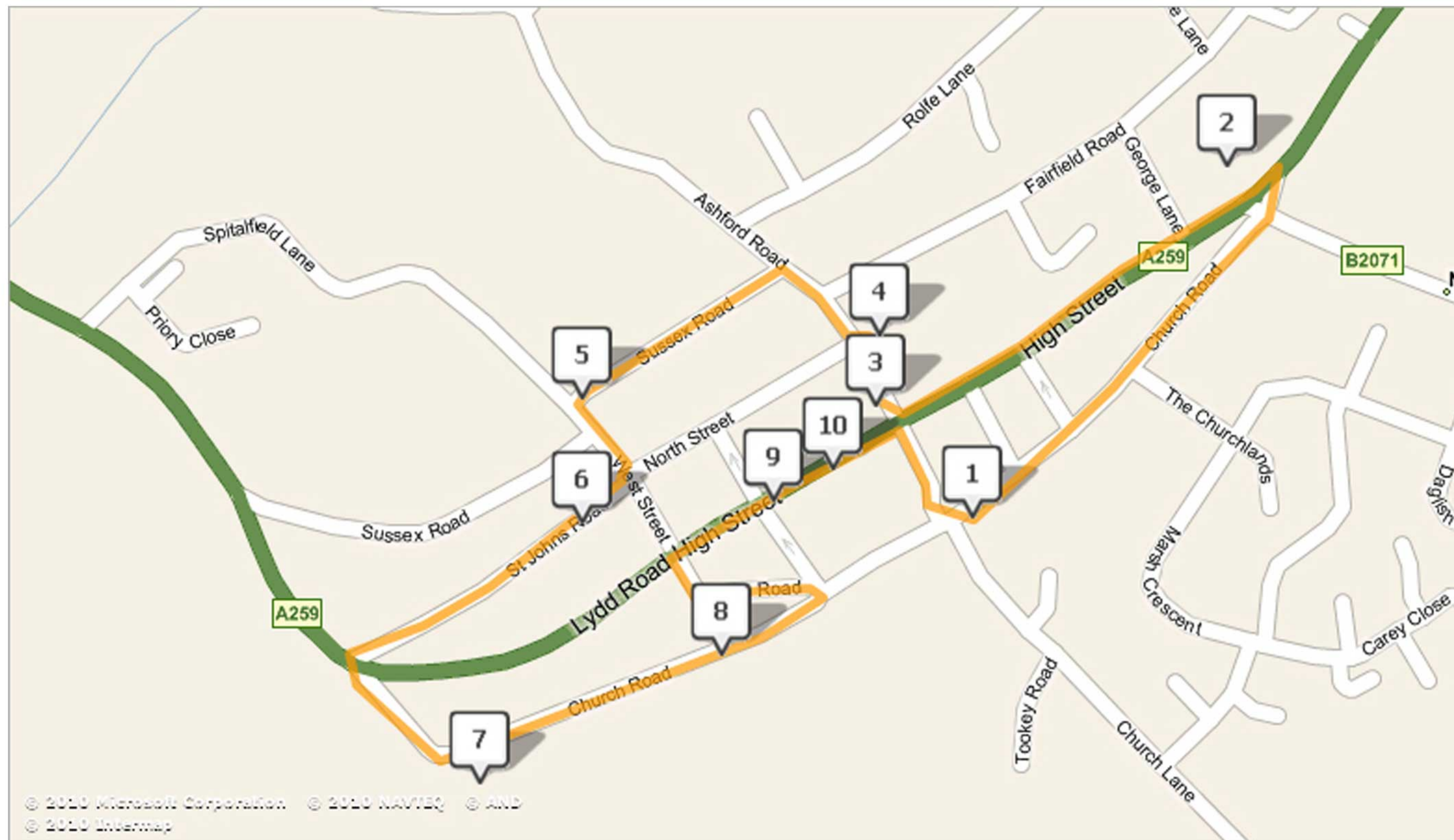


# Norman Walk : Kent : New Romney



## Introduction



New Romney

Start : St Nicholas' Church

Finish : High Street then back to St Nicholas' Church

Distance : 2 miles, approx 1.5 hours

Welcome to this fascinating walk around the streets of New Romney, once a medieval port on the Romney Marsh.

After his victory at the Battle of Hastings, Duke William of Normandy was eager to travel to London to claim the throne of England.

The most direct route was through the Wealden Forest - a horrendous maze of muddy tracks. Without the local knowledge needed for the quickest route, William had to divert his journey and march through Kent instead.



On the way, William heard that the men of a nearby coastal town called Romney were attacking his ships. He immediately ordered a contingent of his soldiers to go and sack the town.

With Romney now subdued he could keep his forces within easy reach of his ships and happily continue on his journey. He went to Dover, Canterbury and Rochester and then on to London and his awaiting prize.

### Steps :

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> St Nicholas' Church             | <b>6</b> St John's Hospital   |
| <b>2</b> The Norman Beachfront           | <b>7</b> The Salt Works       |
| <b>3</b> The Priory, Ashford Road        | <b>8</b> St Lawrence Parish   |
| <b>4</b> St Martin's Field, Ashford Road | <b>9</b> The Cinque Port Arms |
| <b>5</b> The Leper Hospital              | <b>10</b> The Town Hall       |

### Map Keys :

-  Walk Route
-  Roads
-  Rivers

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## Introduction



Gargolye



St Johns Road

At that time, Romney was a small but important port, the place where the River Rother entered the sea. The town was made up of just a simple beach track, a little triangular marketplace and a guildhall for the townspeople - which was something not many early medieval towns had.

Later in about 1240, the town was re-laid out with a new high street and marketplace and became known as New Romney.

Today, New Romney is two or three miles inland and the seaside resorts of Greatstone and Littlestone mark the edges of the old haven.

This walk will take you through the streets of New Romney highlighting medieval features and Norman connections which have helped to shape what the town is today.

## 1 . St Nicholas' Church



St Nicholas' Church



The walk begins at St Nicholas' Church, one of the beautiful early Norman churches in Kent. The building of this church was possibly sponsored by the Archbishop of Canterbury who was one of the lords of the town at the time. Parts of the structure of St Nicholas' Church could date back to as early as the mid-1100s.

Looking up at its magnificent Norman tower, you can imagine its importance as a defence post and lookout across land and sea for enemies, soldiers and ships. At the bottom of the tower you will notice the church doorway is three or four feet lower than ground level. This is because in 1288, there was a great storm which devastated New Romney. Huge amounts of mud, sand and shingle were swept into the town. Piles of small stones and pebbles built up by the church door raising the ground level. You can still see the shingle today at the bottom of the steps to the doorway.

Walk down the road by the side of the church and you come to the back wall of the church grounds. This was almost certainly a harbour wall and back in medieval times ships would have entered the port and thrown their anchors over this wall to moor their vessels. Return to St Nicholas' tower and look across to the other side of Church Road where you can see an old stone building. This is likely to be the remains of a 13th century merchant's house. Merchants based in towns always built in their properties in stone to protect the valuable goods they stored inside. Turn right and walk up Church Road with the church on your right.

## 2 . The Norman Beachfront



The Norman Beachfront

As you walk along Church Road, you are walking along what were once a medieval beach track and New Romney's medieval fish quay where fish would have been landed and sold.

Walk to the end of Church Road and turn left into the High Street, opposite you can see Sainsbury's supermarket.

Where Sainsbury's now stands, archaeologists found a medieval beachfront. Vessels would have been repaired and possibly even built here. Fishing was very important to the people of New Romney and this site would have been a hive of activity with a smoke house for fish, barrel-making, salting and fishermen landing their catch on a daily basis.

Continue down the High Street towards the town centre and you are walking along part of a medieval Passion play procession. A processional cross was actually found buried here in New Romney's High Street.

New Romney's Passion play procession was quite a famous one at the time and the route would have been down the high street, past the town's three churches and on to a play site called Crokhille which was situated just off Church Road.

Continue down the High Street and cross the road at the traffic lights.



### 3 . The Priory



The Priory

Turn right into Ashford Road, cross the road and you are standing next to the remains of a priory.

In 1164, the Archbishop Thomas Becket fell out with King Henry II and tried to flee England by ship from the port of New Romney. Once he had crossed the Channel he was sheltered by the Cistercian Abbey at Pontigny in the Duchy of Burgundy.

In return for helping Thomas Becket, Pontigny Abbey was given the support of St Martin's Church in New Romney to set up a small priory in the town.

These buildings you can see in Ashford Road are part of the old priory complete with its gargoyles.

Later, during the 14th Century wars with France, the King of England severed links with Pontigny Abbey, took control over the little priory and leased the buildings out.

Now cross back over Ashford Road and walk up the road away from the High Street.

### 4 . St Martin's Field



St Martin's Field

On the right you can see a large field; this is St Martin's Field which was once the site of St Martin's Church.

When the storms devastated New Romney, the population fell and it was decided that the town didn't need all three of its original churches.

St Martin's church had probably fallen into a state of disrepair by this time too and so when the townspeople discussed which church to pull down, St Martin's was one that draw a short straw.

St Martin's Field is large, so the church would have been built on a very large site and it was probably quite a substantial building itself, but with little or no congregation the church just was not needed any more.

Today it is a beautiful recreation field and if you walk into the centre, you can see a human sundial. This was created by some students from Southlands School in 2000 to commemorate the Millennium.

If you look up Ashford Road you can see Fairfield Road which runs along side St Martin's Field. As the name suggests this would have been the area where medieval fairs were held.

### 5 . Spitalfield Lane



Spitalfield Lane

Walk further up Ashford Road then turn left into Sussex Road. Please note that some parts of Sussex Road have no pathway, so you will need to walk in the road.

Where Sussex Road meets West Street you can see the sign for Spitalfield Lane. At the end of Spitalfield Lane was the site of New Romney's leper hospital. Also known as the Hospital of the Blessed Stephen and Thomas, this was the first hospital to be built in the town.

Medieval leper hospitals were always on the edge of town because the townspeople didn't want to come in contact with the lepers. They were also situated close to roads or bridges so inmates could beg for handouts from passing travellers.

If you fancy a bit of a stroll up Spitalfield Lane you will come to Priory Close. This is likely to be the actual hospital site. There would have been a chapel, accommodation for the lepers and a graveyard there.

Now there is nothing left to show this, although the name Spitalfield Lane is an obvious reference to the former hospital



## 6 . The Alms Houses



The Alms Houses

Turn left into West Street and continue down the road until you see St John's Road on the right then cross over to the corner. You are now looking the former site of St John's Hospital which was the second hospital to be built in New Romney. This hospital was founded for the poor and the aged of the town and was built in mid 13th Century.

Inmates would have worked in the hospital's brewhouse or bakehouse and on the hospital's lands and gardens. They would have also collected handouts from passing travellers and pilgrims. When it ceased to be a hospital, a local man called John Southlands set up alms houses here and in his will he also provided schooling for the children in the town. Southlands Community School lasted on two different sites right through to the 21st century.

In West Street, there are some surviving stone buildings - 3 Old Stone Cottages and Plantagenet House - which were probably the dwelling of the master of the hospital and the alms houses set up by John Southland. Walk around the corner into St John's Road and on the left you will see a large piece of white wall with a door in it. This is an actual remnant of the hospital's precinct wall and doorway.

Look directly across St John's Road from the old piece of wall and there would have been the burial ground for the hospital. New Romney's mayor and governing men were all buried here because the local church had inadequate burial space. Walk along St John's Road with care as there is no pedestrian pathway in some places.

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## 7 . The Salt Works



The Salt Works

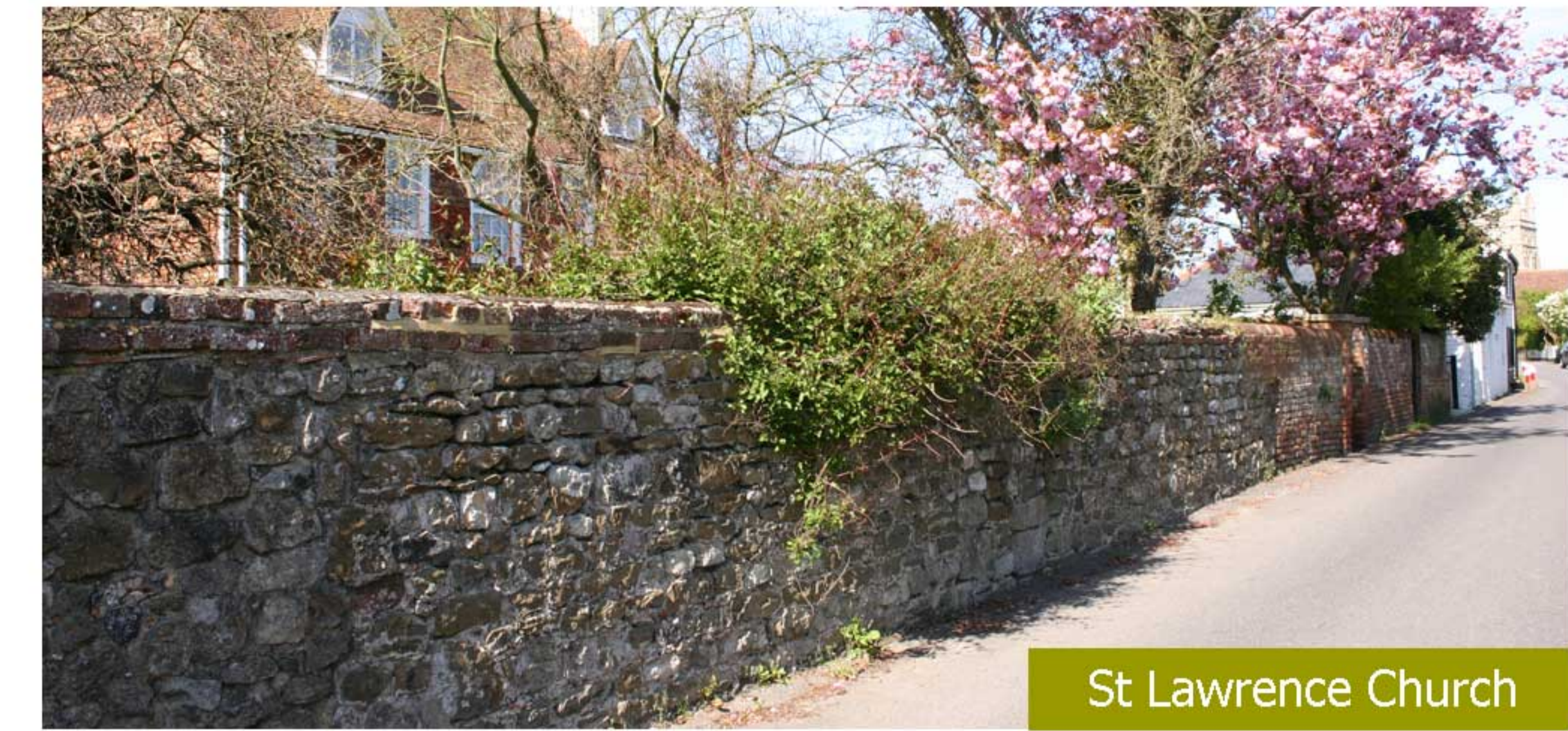
At the end of St John's Road, cross over Lydd Road into Church Road. Take care crossing Lydd Road as it is a main route into New Romney town centre and is very busy. Walk along Church Road, again take care as some areas of this road have no pathway.

In 1086, William the Conqueror commissioned the Domesday Book, a survey recorded by hand in two massive books which assessed the extent of land and resources owned in England at the time. The purpose of the Domesday Book was so that the King could value the land and raise taxes from it. But its legacy means there are extensive records of landowners, tenants, population and uses of land and resources – a valuable record of Norman England.

As you walk down Church Road look at the fields to your right. This area would once have been the tidal estuary of the River Rother and part of the port of New Romney. These green fields were once the site of medieval salt making which is actually recorded in Domesday Book.

You can still see the lumps and bumps in the field which are the remains of the salt making procedures which were carried out here. Although you can still see the mounds they would have been much more prominent in medieval times. Modern farming over recent decades has flattened the land down. Salt production was of considerable importance to the people of New Romney and it is possible that salt manufacture took place here for hundreds of years, from the 11th century or earlier, right up to the 15th century.

## 8 . St Lawrence Church



St Lawrence Church

Continue walking along Church Road towards St Nicholas' Church and again you are walking along the medieval beach track.

On the left hand side of the road is part of an old stone wall with an arch in it. This arch was possibly reconstructed by the Victorians but situated beyond the stone wall would have been the last of the three medieval churches of New Romney - St Lawrence's Church.

St Lawrence's Church, as with St Martin's, lost the battle to survive and was taken down by the townspeople when there was just not enough of a congregation to support it.

This area of town, known as St Lawrence's Parish, was the civic and commercial quarter of the town. French and Jewish people would have lived in this part of New Romney trading their goods and wares. There would have been vintners, pastry cooks, glovers, cutlers, goldsmiths and coiners all living and doing business in this area.

If you look at the houses on opposite side of the Church Road, you will see that one resident has named their house 'Old Strand' in recognition that the house is built on the early beach track.

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## 8 . St Lawrence Church (cont.)



St Lawrence Church

Walk along Church Road and turn left into Victoria Road and immediately left again into Lion's Road. On your left is the triangular space which would have been the Norman marketplace before the town was re-laid out.

Very early medieval market spaces were triangular in shape but the ones that were laid out later in the 13th century, like New Romney's new High Street, were often shaped more like a cigar - widening out in the middle.

This was so that the market could be held along the High Street where there would be more foot traffic and therefore more potential customers.

## 9 . The Cinque Port Arms



The Cinque Port Arms

At the end of Lion's Road turn right and you are in the High Street outside the Cinque Port Arms.

At time of the Domesday Book, there were just six towns or boroughs in Kent – two large ones, Canterbury and Rochester, and four smaller ones New Romney, Hythe, Sandwich and Dover.

The small towns were really important because the men who lived in these coastal areas owed the king 'ship service'. This meant they were forced to use their trading and fishing vessels to transport horses, men, and sometimes even the monarch himself, back and forwards across the Channel. Together with Hastings, these towns became known as the Cinque Ports and in exchange for the use of their ships and sailors by the crown, the towns received significant trade concessions and rights to run their own legal affairs.

In the Cinque Ports, the inns or taverns were places where people made deals, got credit for buying goods and arranged the shipping of merchandise across the Channel. Originally there were six taverns in New Romney, however two didn't survive – the Rome and the Jerusalem. As their names suggest these two taverns were places where pilgrims gathered to catch boats across the Channel to go on pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem and other places.

As you walk up the High Street, cross Victoria Street and opposite you will see Rome Road where the Rome tavern would have been. On the right of the High Street, number 14 is a building called Jerusalem where the Jerusalem Inn was probably situated.

## 10 . The High Street & Town Hall



The High Street & Town Hall

Continue to walk up the High Street and you will notice how the road layout widens into a cigar shape to accommodate the later medieval street market.

Today the High Street is a busy road with an almost continual stream of traffic running through it. In medieval times this road would have been full of market traders selling their wares with the hustle and bustle of the locals clamouring to get a bargain.

Walk along the High Street until you arrive at the Town Hall on your left.

The Town Hall building proudly displays the seal of the mayor of the Port of Romney. The three lions or leopards within the seal are from the royal arms of England but their origins are Norman.

The Bayeux Tapestry tells the story of the Norman Conquest and within it there is an image of the Bishop of Bayeux, Odo - William the Conqueror's half brother. William gave his half brother the title of Earl of Kent, a title which gave him a great deal of power in the county, but that's another story.



## 10 . The High Street & Town Hall (cont.)



In the tapestry, Odo is seen blessing food and wine. On the tablecloth is an earlier version of the royal arms with two lions or leopards on it. This was the arms of the house of Normandy which subsequently developed into the arms of the Kings of England.

These royal arms are found in all the Cinque Port towns because the Cinque Ports always wanted to stress their association with the King.

They are present in many places in New Romney. We have already seen them at the Cinque Port Arms and on the front of the Town Hall but there is also hidden version of the arms in the High Street.

A piece of stained glass over the front door of 44 High Street shows the royal arms. The glass has been covered up by a piece of thick Perspex to protect it but from the inside it can be seen clearly.

It was important for New Romney to keep emphasising its connection with the king all the way through its history, from the Norman period onwards, through the Cinque Port arms and the arms of England. There are possibly even more versions of the royal arms around the town to discover.

Continue along the High Street, turn right into Church Approach and walk back towards the magnificent Norman tower of St Nicholas' Church, where the walk ends.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history>

## Credits :



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Gillian Draper and Frank Meddens, *The Sea and the Marsh: the Medieval Cinque Port of New Romney revealed through archaeological excavations and historical research* (Pre-Construct Archaeology Monograph 10, 2009).

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