

# Darent Valley

- full walk (inc. 5 km to Darent) 17 km
- from Farningham 11 km
- from Farningham Road 7 km

- ▭ paved area
- steps

↕ connection with another walk

1 kilometre



**TO BE COMPLETED AFTER COVID  
HAS BEEN ELIMINATED**



## walk notes

*This walk follows the river Darent down as far as Dartford. The freedom pass ends at Swanley but you can start the walk nearer to the river using the bus or paying to go one stop more on the railway.*

### **River Darent**

The River Darent is a chalk stream and the defining feature in the Darent Valley landscape. It has played a fundamental role in attracting the original settlement by humans thousands of years ago. The river created fertile land for farming, provided transport into London and generated power to work the many mills along its length. It has also shaped the land by carving through the chalk on its way from its source in Westerham to where it flows into the River Thames north of Dartford. It is the river and the valley sides that clearly define the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme area.

Until the late 1800s the Darent was considered one of the finest trout chalk rivers in the country. It was well-known for its bountiful supply of fish and popular amongst fly fishermen through the centuries. However the fortunes of the river have changed over time. Abstraction to meet the water supply of a growing London population meant that during natural periods of drought between 1976 and 1991, parts of the river dried up completely. Since then, and following the launch of the Darent Action Plan by the National Rivers Authority in 1992, the river has greatly recovered.

Rare wildlife such as otter and water vole are now present on the river and aquatic plants such as water crowfoot are well established.

### **Dartford**

Many archaeological investigations have revealed a good picture of occupation of the district, with important finds from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. Dartford was established by the Romans at a ford on Watling Steet across the River Darent, giving it its name. Dartford grew in prosperity during the Middle Ages, owing to its location on the main pilgrim route to Canterbury.

The manor was owned by the crown at the time of the Domesday Book of 1086 but by the 12th century the Knights Templar owned it, and by the 14th century, a priory and 2 monastic hospitals were founded. Dartford was a gathering place for rebels during the ill-fated Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

The medieval priory was dissolved by Henry

VIII in 1538, and a new royal manor house constructed from the ruins, of which the gatehouse still stands.

The earliest industries were those connected with agriculture, such as the brewing of traditional beers and ales. Lime-burning and chalk-mining also had their place. Fulling was another: the cleansing of wool needed a great deal of water, which the river could provide. This led to other water-based industries, using hydropower to operate machinery. The very first paper mill in England was established here in 1588, and the town later became a busy iron-making centre. The Cornish engineer Richard Trevithick is buried in the parish church.