Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Little Chart

Distance: 5 km=3 miles — easy walking

Region: Kent — Date written: 5-aug-2019

Author: Malinovka — Last update: 7-oct-2026

Refreshments: Little Chart

Map: Explorer 137 (Ashford) *but the map in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

Public rights are restricted to printing, copying or distributing this document exactly as seen here, complete and without any cutting or editing. See *Principles* on main webpage.

Watermill, church ruins, woodland, country house, easy field paths, pub

In Brief

This easy walk takes you through a quiet corner of Kent revealing much about its history and including several surprises. You encounter a ruined church and the mere spectre of a once-great house. The village itself is a charmer with a mixture of styles, including outstanding medieval timbered houses and what was a large watermill.

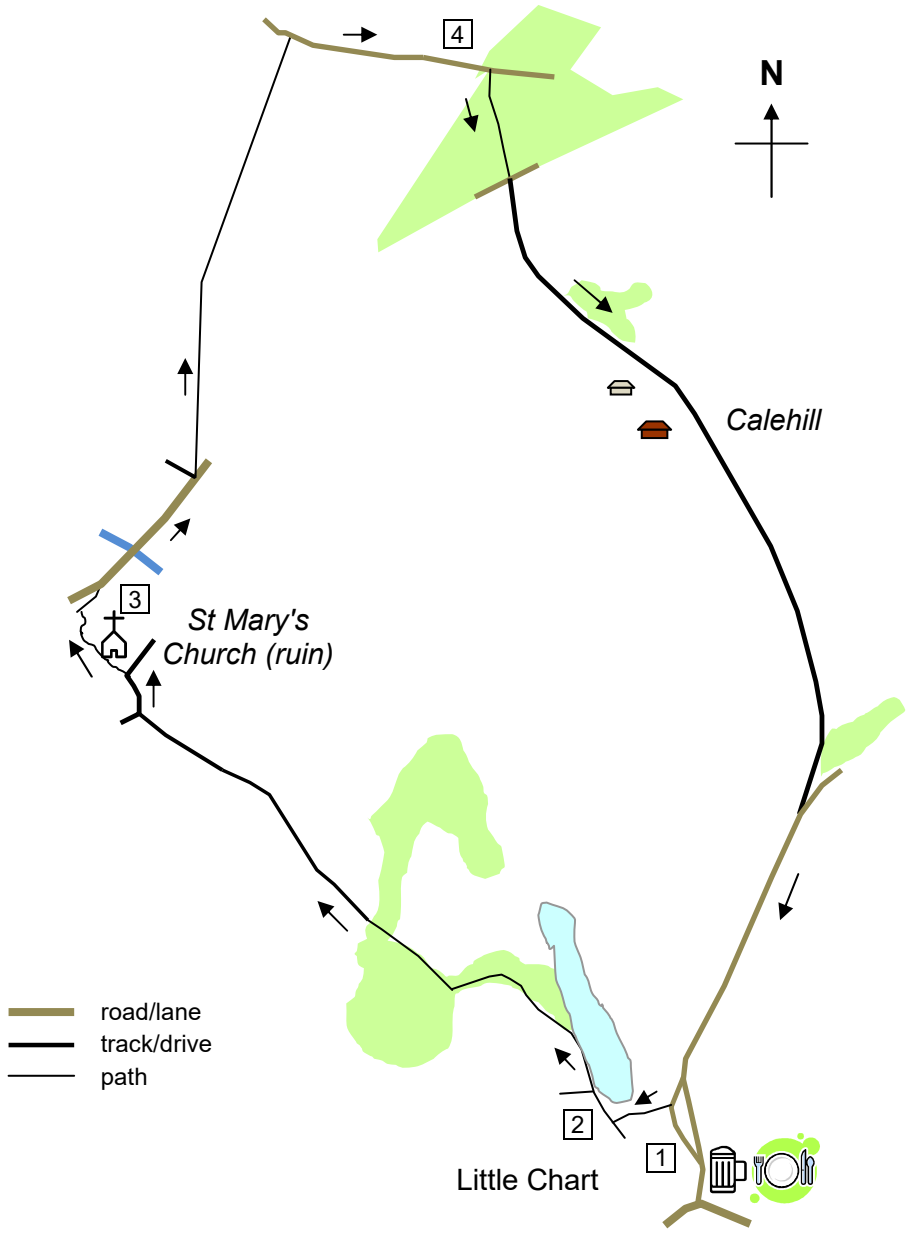
The village is centred on an excellent inn (to enquire at *The Swan*, ring 01233-840011).

There are no nettles or undergrowth on this walk, so it's fine to wear shorts. Boots are not required. Your dog can come too.

The walk begins in the small village of **Little Chart**, near Ashford, Kent, postcode **TN27 0QB**. The village is lined up along the side road next to the *Swan Inn*. There is roadside parking in the village or, on a quiet day and provided that you intend to eat and drink there, in the car park next to the *Swan*. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The name of Little Chart comes from an Old English word meaning "rough ground". The prefix "little" distinguishes it from Chart Sutton and Chartham. In the Domesday Book, it appears as "Litelcert". Just to the west of the village, agricultural excavation work turned up a piece of mosaic. Work stopped and archaeologists discovered a Roman villa, complete with a large bathhouse.



1 The walk begins near the start of the village of Little Chart. (If you parked at or near the *Swan Inn* on the major road, you need to walk down The Street beside the inn.) Keep to the far side of the green (that is, on the **left** if coming from the pub and the main road) where there are some spectacular timbered houses, including *Bank House*. You can also see Ford Mill through a gate. *The millhouse and warehouse of the old Ford Mill have been preserved amongst the new structures; Ford Mill is 350 years old and in the last century it manufactured high quality paper.* Immediately after the Mill, next to a

black-and-white timbered cottage, turn into a narrow concrete passageway. (There is a small signpost on the other side of the lane.) This path takes you over the millrace and past the large millpond with a weeping willow on your right. Follow the wooden fence, going over a bridge across a stream, to come out into a crop field. *Note that you are on part of the Stour Valley long-distance trail.*

2 Turn **right** along the edge of the field, ignoring a footpath on your left in 50m. Stay on the edge as it curves left past a willow bank and goes under wires. Before the corner, go **right** through a gap past a marker post and follow the grass beside a wire fence on your right. A pasture for thoroughbreds and sombre poplars framing the raised garden of Hassock Wood lend this spot a memorable atmosphere. Follow the wide farm track, keeping straight on past farm buildings. Where you reach a tarmac drive coming from *Woodland Barn* and *The Byre*, keep **right**. Where the tarmac bends right, keep straight on on a narrow grass path. Your path goes up two steps to give you full view of the four colourful oasts of *Chart Court*. In a trice you are in the churchyard of the ruined St Mary's Church.

The nave and chancel of this church were built in 1250 from local ragstone, with other parts added later by the Darell family (see below). A monument to Sir John one stood in the church. However, the Darells were an openly Catholic family; so, by the 1700s, the Anglican church was neglected in favour of the chapel at Calehill. The church was thoroughly renovated in Victorian times. Then, by a twist of fate, the church was hit by a V1 flying bomb at the end of WW2 (possibly shot down on its way to London), reducing it to its present state of ruin. A new church was consecrated in the village (not far from the pub) in 1955. It contains some of the monuments salvaged from the old church and, in its tower, the clock from the demolished Calehill mansion.

3 After a pause, and possibly a rest on the seat overlooking the countryside, make your way down the slope, to the left of some gravestones, gently down to the main road. Turn **right** on the road, shortly crossing a bridge over the River Stour. After 200m on the road, just after a drive on your left, by a small signpost, next to a (bypassable) large metal gate, go diagonally **left** on a good straight path across a crop field. This path skirts the grounds of a large house and continues in the same direction, soon passing under wires. Your exit is via a gap in the hedging, just to the right of a large double wooden gate, identified by a tall marker post just about visible ahead. Turn **right** on the very quiet tarmac lane (Hunger Hatch). This lane was harvested of the majority of its tall trees in 2019 and replaced with a light forest of new saplings.

4 After around 250m on the lane the field on your right ends at double metal gates. Almost immediately, turn **right** onto a narrow, unmarked footpath. The path is overgrown at first but soon clears. Your path meanders its way through bushes and past some trees. In 150m or so you reach a road (next to a signpost which confirms that you were on a footpath). Cross straight over between tall columns onto a driveway for *Calehill House*, also an official footpath. This wide tarmac or concrete drive will deliver you on an easy route almost back to Little Chart. At first you pass the *Dower House* (historically built for the matriarch of the family). There is a new house *(note the simulated cow)* and you catch sight of the turreted house.

There were earlier houses called Calehill, the first having been built by Sir John Darell who died in 1438. The Darells were a powerful Kentish family, originally

from Yorkshire, and they owned Calehill Park (and House) until the 1900s. The last Calehill House, built in the 1700s, was a was a great Georgian mansion with an even older stable block and a chapel block on the sides. But the big house was demolished in 1953. The building that remains. the old stable block, once a ballroom and art gallery, is still called "Calehill House".

5 Continue on the driveway, soon running in open country and finally coming out to a road. Turn **right** on the road, quickly arriving at the first houses of the village and thence back, conveniently nearer to the *Swan Inn*, where the walk began.

The Swan Inn is housed in a historic building from the end of the 1400s. As an old coaching inn, it has preserved the original coaching stables. But travellers arriving in past centuries would not have been given such a large and varied menu. (They also provide snacks and quick bites.) Ales are Sharp's and Red Top from Tenterden. The Swan is open every day, including in the afternoon.

Getting there

By car: Little Chart is signed off the Pluckley Road just outside Charing. If coming from the M25 / M20, come off come off at junction 8 (*Leeds Castle*). Take the A20 for 9 miles to the big roundabout just before Charing. Keep **right** here, staying on the A20, signposted *Ashford*. In only 500 yds, take a **right** turn for *Pluckley*. In just over 1 mile, you cross the M20 motorway. Immediately, at a small signpost, turn **left** on a road for *Little Chart*. You come through the village after 1 mile or so. Park opposite the green and the mill or continue to the main road where the *Swan* is on your left.

By bus/train: bus 123 from Ashford. Check the timetables.

*fancy **more** free walks?* www.fancyfreewalks.org