

## **The last village**

A self-guided walk around Bexley



Discover how Bexley has developed over the last thousand years  
Find out how the village looked in Saxon and medieval times  
Learn how villagers have made a living over the centuries  
Explore an ancient settlement embracing the twenty-first century

[www.discoveringbritain.org](http://www.discoveringbritain.org)

**the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks**





## Contents

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| Introduction          | 3  |
| Practical information | 4  |
| Route maps            | 6  |
| Directions            | 9  |
| Further information   | 13 |
| Credits               | 14 |

© The Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, London, 2011, 2014

Discovering Britain is a project of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The digital and print maps used for Discovering Britain are licensed to the RGS-IBG from Ordnance Survey

Cover image: Bexley High Street (c.1910) © Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

---

# The last village

## Explore the fortunes of a historic settlement on the edge of London

In the Domesday survey of 1086 the village of Bexlea - meaning 'a settlement in a clearing in the woods' - had 41 inhabitants with 100 pigs and 10 ploughs. It was valued at £20.

Today, Bexley is virtually the last village on the edge of London and maintains a distinct feel and character. This walk explores how Bexley village has developed over more than a thousand years.



Bexley High Street (1910)  
© Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

We will discover evidence in the buildings and streets of how the village looked in Saxon and medieval times. We will find out how and why it changed in the Victorian and post-war eras. We will learn about the lives of villagers over the centuries and what they have done for a living. And will we also discover how Bexley's position on the banks of the River Cray has brought both advantages and disadvantages.



River Cray signpost / 1930s housing at Coldblow  
© Rory Walsh

---

## Practical information

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Location</b>      | Bexley, Greater London  |
| <b>Start point</b>   | Bexley railway station, DA5 1AQ   |
| <b>Finish point</b>  | The Freemantle Hall, High Street, DA5 1AA   |
| <b>Distance</b>      | 3 miles   |
| <b>Getting there</b> | <p><b>Train</b> - From Kent there are usually 1-2 services an hour from Gravesend, Ebbsfleet and Ashford International stations.</p> <p>From London, 2-4 services every hour from Charing Cross, Cannon Street, London Victoria, London Bridge or Waterloo.</p> <p><b>Bus</b> - Various services stop on Bourne Road, including routes 132, 229, 492 and B12.</p> <p><b>Car</b> - Bexley is very close to the Black Prince Interchange of the A2 (exit signs towards Bexley and A322). You can also use the A224 exit on the A20. Car parking is available at Bexley station, Thanet Road and Bexley High Street (charges apply).</p> |
| <b>Level</b>         | Gentle – A mostly flat route in the village and surrounding countryside.  |

---

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Terrain</b>             | Pavements, footpaths and parkland. The path beside Churchfield Wood (Stop 10) can be muddy so take appropriate footwear.  |
| <b>Conditions</b>          | Traffic can be busy in the village centre . A small portion of the walk is beside the A2 road, so if you are with children make sure to keep a close eye on them. Hall Place Gardens (Stop 13) can become flooded in extreme weather.               |
| <b>Suitable for</b>        | <b>Families</b> – Children will enjoy exploring Hall Place Gardens.   |
| <b>Refreshments</b>        | Several cafés and pubs on the High Street plus the Riverside Café at Hall Place (Stop 14).  |
| <b>Toilets</b>             | Toilets available at Hall Place (Stop 14). There are no longer any public toilets in Bexley village.  |
| <b>Places to visit</b>     | <b>Hall Place</b> historic house is open 10am-5pm April-October, 10am-4pm November-March. The Gardens open 9am - dusk.<br><a href="http://www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk/hallplace">www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk/hallplace</a> Tel: 01322 526 574 |
| <b>Tourist information</b> | Bexley Tourist Information, The Central Library, Townley Road, Bexleyheath DA6 7HJ (Tel: 020 8303 7777)   |

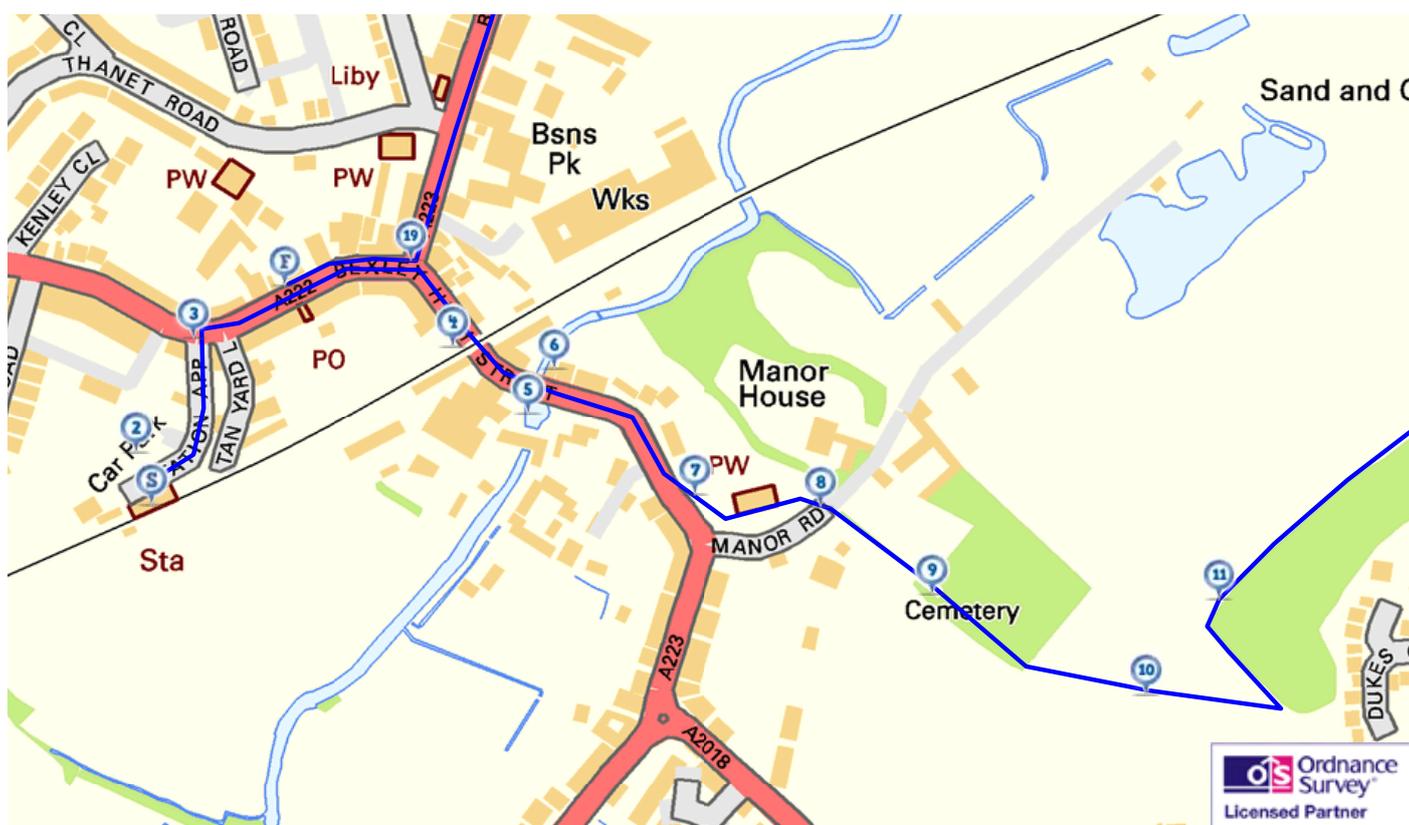
---

## Route overview



---

## Start and end of the route



### Stopping points

- Start.** Bexley railway station
- 2.** Bexley railway station
  - 3.** Corner of Station Approach and High Street
  - 4.** Maharajah Indian restaurant, 84 High Street
  - 5.** Bridge over the River Cray, High Street
  - 6.** 101 High Street
  - 7.** St Mary's Church grounds
  - 8.** Manor House, end of Manor Road
  - 9.** Cemetery off Manor Road
  - 10.** Footpath between graveyard and Churchfield Wood
  - 11.** Edge of Churchfield Wood
  - ...
  - 19.** Junction of Bourne Road and High Street
- Finish.** The Freemantle Hall, 51-75 High Street

---

## Middle section of the route



### Stopping points

- 12.** Floodplain by bridge under the A2
- 13.** Hall Place Gardens
- 14.** Hall Place
- 15.** Gravel Hill roundabout
- 16.** Bridge over the A2, Bourne Road
- 17.** Dartfordians Rugby Club, Bourne Road
- 18.** National School, Bourne Road

---

## Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions below to get to the next stop.

### 1. Welcome to Bexley

#### Bexley railway station

##### Directions 1

Remain outside Bexley railway station and listen to Track 2.

### 2. The train of change

#### Bexley railway station

##### Directions 2

Walk down Station Approach. Stop at the junction with the High Street to listen to Track 3.

### 3. Before the railway

#### Corner of Station Approach and High Street

##### Directions 3

Turn right and walk along the High Street. At the mini-roundabout keep right. When you reach a turning on the right leading to a car park (just before the railway bridge) look at the building on the corner, now an Indian restaurant. Listen to Track 4.

### 4. Fire insurance

#### Indian restaurant, High Street

##### Directions 4

Continue along the High Street and under the railway bridge. Stop at the bridge over the River Cray and listen to Track 5.

### 5. A bridge over useful water

#### Bridge over the River Cray, High Street

##### Directions 5

Turn away from the mill and look at the opposite side of the road at the houses behind the railings. Listen to Track 6.

---

---

## 6. Houses within houses

### Number 101, High Street

#### Directions 6

Continue along the High Street. Cross over at a safe point and enter into St Mary's Church grounds. Listen to Track 7.

## 7. Bare bones and grave robbery

### St Mary's Church grounds

#### Directions 7

Leave the churchyard by the main gate then turn left into Manor Road. Keep the church on your left turn left and stop at the entrance to the Manor House. Listen here to Track 8.

## 8. The former seat of power

### The Manor House, Manor Road

#### Directions 8

Go through the gateway that lies between the entrance to Manor Farm Cottages and Manor Cottage into the cemetery. Follow the track to the big tree, stop at the information board round the corner and listen to Track 9.

## 9. Final resting place

### Cemetery off Manor Road

#### Directions 9

Follow the footpath straight up through the cemetery and leave through a small gateway. Turn left onto a tarmac path. Stop after about 50 metres and listen to Track 10.

## 10. To bypass or not to bypass

### Footpath between graveyard and Churchfield Wood

#### Directions 10

Continue up the path. Just before the houses, turn left onto the footpath (number 127) into Churchfield Wood. Follow the footpath on the edge of the wood. After a short distance, the path bends slightly to the right and there are four electrical junction boxes. Go about ten metres further and stop at a spot with a clear view of the gravel heaps. Listen to Track 11.

---

## 11. A new town

### Edge of Churchfield Wood

#### Directions 11

Continue along the footpath on the edge of the wood. At the end, go over the stile and turn left down the tarmac footpath with the embankment and road on your right. Stop where the path meets the railway line and listen to Track 12.

## 12. Soil and gravel

### Floodplain by bridge under A2

#### Directions 12

Follow the footpath under the road bridge. Follow the footpath to a fork. Turn right up the slope to the main road. Turn right onto the road bridge over the railway. Take great care here because the traffic is very busy.

Immediately after the bridge, take the steps down to the right. At the bottom, go through the gate into Hall Place Gardens. Keep the hedge on your left, even when it makes a left turn. Stop at the first break in the hedge by a wooden bridge over a ditch. Listen to Track 13.

## 13. No swimming

### Hall Place Gardens

#### Directions 13

Continue following the path beside the hedge. Cross over the river using the footbridge to the left. Follow the footpath beside the brick wall through the car park. Turn left, still with the brick wall on your left. After a short distance, turn left into Hall Place Gardens. It is open daily from 9am to dusk.

Go into the gardens and turn right down the central path following signs for the Visitor Centre and Historic House. At the Visitor Centre, you may want to use the toilets or have a break in the café. When you are ready go through the far side of the Visitor Centre and stop in the gardens outside to look at Hall Place house. Listen to Track 14.

## 14. Ghosts and secret codes

### Hall Place

#### Directions 14

Do go inside the house if you are interested. It is open daily from 10am to 4pm but there is an entrance charge. When you are ready, retrace your steps through the Visitor Centre and the garden. At the exit, turn left and follow the perimeter wall of Hall Place through the car park and on to Bourne Road. Stop at the main gates of the house for a fine view of the other side of the building. Continue a short way along the pavement and stop in a safe place at the roundabout. Listen to Track 15.

---

## **15. The strawberry train**

### **Gravel Hill roundabout**

#### **Directions 15**

Keep left at the roundabout, following the signs for Bexley. Stop on the bridge over the A2, or if you prefer, find a quieter place a little further on. Listen to Track 16.

## **16. Ancient and modern roads**

### **Bridge over the A2, Bourne Road**

#### **Directions 16**

Once over the bridge, continue along the left hand side of Bourne Road. Stop at the entrance to the sports ground on the left and listen to Track 17.

## **17. Playing on a floodplain**

### **Entrance to Dartfordians Rugby Club, Bourne Road**

#### **Directions 17**

Keep left around the roundabout and continue down Bourne Road towards Bexley village. Stop opposite the National School and listen to Track 18.

## **18. Victorian Bexley**

### **National School, Bourne Road**

#### **Directions 18**

Continue along Bourne Road to the junction with the High Street where there is a mini roundabout. Stop at a safe place by the roundabout. Listen to Track 19.

## **19. The modern village**

### **Junction of Bourne Road and High Street**

#### **Directions 19**

Continue into the High Street. Stop just past The King's Head pub outside The Freemantle Hall. Listen to Track 20.

---

## **20. On the edge of the twenty-first century**

### **The Freemantle Hall, 51-75 High Street**

#### **Directions 20**

You may like to explore the village further. To return to Bexley railway station, cross over the High Street and continue along the left hand side. Turn left at the red telephone box into Station Approach.

---

## **Further information**

#### **Bexley Historical Society**

[www.bexleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.bexleyhistoricalsociety.co.uk)

#### **Hall Place and Gardens**

[www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk/hallplace](http://www.bexleyheritagetrust.org.uk/hallplace)

#### **The King's Head**

[www.kingsheadbexley.co.uk](http://www.kingsheadbexley.co.uk)

#### **St Mary's Church**

[www.stmarysbexley.co.uk](http://www.stmarysbexley.co.uk)

---

## Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

- **Raymond Molony FRGS** for creating the walk and providing photographs
- **Jenny Lunn** for editing the walk materials
- **Rory Walsh** for dogged persistence in the face of wind and rain to make the audio recording and take photographs
- **Caroline Millar** for editing the audio commentary
- **Nick Stanworth, Gemma Coate** and **Sam Carlsson** for additional assistance with compiling walk resources
- **Russell Gray**, a local historian, who provided very helpful information
- **Simon McKeon**, the Bexley Borough archivist, for his assistance
- **Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre** and **Britain From Above** for kind permission to use archive images from their collections
- **Laura Shawyer** for testing the walk and providing additional photographs
- **Richard Hoare** for additional photographs reproduced under Creative Commons License

---

## Try other Discovering Britain walks that explore how towns and cities have developed

### From castle to county town

Discover the fascinating story of Warwick's development

<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/west-midlands/warwick.html>



### Housing bubbles

Explore the 'model village' of Port Sunlight on the Wirral

<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/north-west-england/port-sunlight.html>



### From shipping to shopping

Discover the rebirth of historic Portsmouth

<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/south-east-england/portsmouth.html>



### Taking the waters

Discover the changing fortunes of the spa town of Leamington

<http://www.discoveringbritain.org/walks/region/west-midlands/leamington-spa.html>





**Britain's landscapes are wonderful.**

**There is a tremendous variety within our shores – whether in the countryside, in towns and cities or at the seaside. And every landscape has a story to tell about our past and present.**

**Discovering Britain is an exciting series of geographically-themed walks that aim to bring these stories alive and inspire everyone to explore and learn more about Britain. Each walk looks at a particular landscape, finding out about how forces of nature, people, events and the economy have created what you see today.**

**The self-guided walks are fun, informative and inspiring. Prepare to discover something new, to be surprised and to find the unexpected.**

**Visit [www.discoveringbritain.org](http://www.discoveringbritain.org) to**

**Send your review of this walk**

**Search for other walks**

**Suggest a new walk**