**Saxon Shore Backwards, Saturday 9th December 2017**

18 walkers, 20 miles – leader Peter Aylmer

Three castles, two estuaries, and a national nature reserve. Except that the leader got it wrong in his briefing and there are in fact not three castles  but two (one of which is the home of Jools Holland), though to make up for it there are two Thames-side forts near the end, which once guarded London against intruders down its river. This is a walk that's far better on the ground than it looks on the map – by no means just a plod round an estuary: first, the tidal foreshore of the Medway, then a slight rise by green lane to Northward Hill, not only a nature reserve but a glorious viewpoint for a magnificent Thames panorama from Southend to Tilbury and beyond. Lunch in a super local pub, the Horseshoe & Castle in Cooling, with a literary diversion after to the village churchyard, site of Dickens' superbly scary opening scene in Great Expectations where Magwitch grabs Pip by the collar. And to cap it all, a splendid winter's day, chilly but bright.

Photographs by Peter Aylmer; more by Bola Baruwa and Gavin Fuller on the group Facebook page