**Timeball and Telegraph Trail Part 2 – Dartford to Rochester, Sunday 17th February 2019**

32 walkers, 19 miles – leader Peter Jull

Assorted trains, buses and automobiles gathered many walkers at Dartford station. Briefly though the town centre to Central Park for a brief briefing and confirmatory count. 32 to be shepherded and oft recounted through the day. Out of town on the Darenth Valley Way then outside the M25 head for the hills to reveal the range of speeds to be accommodated. A lost count number of burnt out joy rides blotted the woodscape, perplexing how they ever got amongst such denseness. Atop the next hill a modern telecoms mast and water tower have supplanted the Swanscombe semaphore telegraph station now separated from the village by a fattened and fastered A2. 200 years of trees have obstructed the view back to Shooters Hill but moving on, winter sparse vegetation allowed glimpses of sight lines the prominence had provided towards Gads Hill. A late elevenses in Southfleet churchyard and the potential lunch pub there was passed to soon. Power professionals would appreciate the proliferation of pylons marching with us the next miles. It was peak hungry time on arrival at Jeskyns country park and the small cafe there. Its 16 inside seats were never going to be enough for us, let alone the tenfold dog walkers also exercising the park.  But February was being balmy almost under blue skies so the plentiful picnic tables sufficed. Coffee and toilets patiently queued for; with inactivity the breeze began to chill so on across fast rail and road into Shorne Wood country park instead. Safely navigated to the other side potential lunch pub two was passed too late. Last big hill past then above Dicken’s Gads Hill to where the semaphore telegraph once stood. Modern trees and houses again obscure the sight lines bar glimpses that need the telescopes they had to see 10 miles. Last stretch to the edge of Rochester then long downhill from the bottom of which, despite averaging 3+ mph all day, the leading lot gazelled ahead to ensure the 4:21 to Victoria. Now they’ll have to do the castle bit at the start of the next leg.

Photographs by Stephen Lannon; more by Stephen on the group Facebook site