**Swalecliffe to Birchington, Saturday 29th January 2011**

21 walkers, 22 miles – leader Mike Ratcliff

Twenty-one of us met in the sleepy suburb of Whitstable that is Swalecliffe on a very chilly Saturday morning in late January. The exposed north Kent coastline soon came into view within minutes of leaving the station while walking north through some residential streets. We took a right turn near the sea wall to begin a long stretch walking east towards Herne Bay with the remains of its old pier appearing out of the sea like a ship approaching the town. After reaching Hampton Pier, the centre of the town became more conspicuous while we made our way past many beach huts and then seafront cafe's and amusements. Passing through Herne Bay we continued our way along the Saxon Shore Way to Bishopstone where we left the coast to take a southerly route bringing us now inland across our first fields of the day with super views looking south down to the low agricultural land of the Thanet Peninsula. Following the Wantsum Walk we soon crossed the Thanet Way and closed in on the tiny hamlet of Boyden Gate where we began our most desolate stretch of walking of the day across the Chislet Marshes towards our most southerly point at Chitty and eventually to Sarre in the east where we stopped for lunch. The day was cold, grey and overcast all morning until this point where we began to see the first chinks of blue sky with some encouraging beams of sun warming the mood of the place as we relaxed for some well-earned food and drink. We had by now completed twelve miles and leaving the pub for another ten, we left Sarre to walk north, once again picking up the Wantsum Walk. This gradually guided us back up to the A299 near St Nicholas at Wade and then over more low reclaimed farmland towards the stunning towers of Reculver which had been within sight from different angles all day, standing proud on the cliff top between Herne Bay and Margate. Reaching this nodal point of the walk with its mixture of ancient Roman and medieval ruins we began our final push eastwards to our eventual finish at Birchington on Sea which lies on the western edge of Margate. As the terrain was so exposed with the freezing North Sea to our left and the bleak open expanse of Thanet to our right, there was no shelter from the elements at all for the last few miles which gave our group a rather interesting twist to the day as the wind was still blowing from the north east as it had done all day but the chilly bite had now become quite fierce indeed, with many of us having the use every piece of clothing we had to protect us from the piercing cold blowing directly at us off the sea. Being able to see our target from so far away also made the final few miles deceptive as the town never seems to get any closer when the visibility is so good like that. We did however eventually arrive in Birchington all quite exhilarated, not to say exhausted, well before dusk and a great sense of satisfaction it seemed all round.