Walking Sideways in Sandwich

walks by Sonia Overall
with further provocations by Phil Smith
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About sideways walking

Whether we are in Shanghai, Paris or Sandwich most of the journeys we take are functional and target-driven. To work, to the shops, to the cinema, to buy something, to take something to the recycling, to visit a friend. Very rarely does anyone take a journey for its own sake, and even then it can be more about being sociable or improving their health and fitness; the journey-taker may not pay much attention to their journeying, nor to the array of places they pass through. This may all be about busy lives, or maybe because we think that the places we pass through are unexceptional, bland and without much to say for themselves. We have seen them so many times.

There is, however, a way of walking – ‘sideways walking’ – that changes all this. First, it slows things down. There is no particular use to it, no target for it, it does not serve anything but itself and the pleasures and revelations that it draws down. It requires a new way of looking; not looking into the near distance and clocking the things passed by in order to avoid them, but instead focussing on the details and textures of what is close to hand. Examining the marks on bricks, the faint traces of old signs, the shadow left by something that has gone. You may be surprised by the connections you find. The evidence of exotic products, of communications to faraway; a warning sign for transatlantic cables, the derelict office of a trading company, Hello Kitty and manga-influenced shop design. You may be surprised by the layers of history that you turn up; the odd-one-out house that was once a bomb crater, a remnant of railway track in a fence, or medieval graffiti carved into a church porch. Some things you find maybe make no sense at all, until you ask or look online and then you find there are stories, hauntings, crimes, failures, daring investments, self-sacrifice, obsessions, plans, tricks, illusions and ideals that have made things as they are.

But it’s not just about seeing, reading and thinking. A slow exploration is also about touching, holding and picking up. Collecting ‘valueless’ relics from streets, rubbing the bumps of fossilised coral in the stones of an old building or running your finger along the thick red smoothness of multiple layers of paint on a postbox. It is about savouring the aromas of production – of wood cut, grass mowed, leather being worked or onions fried – and enjoying the spectrum of window displays; all without spending a cent, fulfilling an obligation or completing an errand. This kind of walking is a simple luxury, a recovering of pleasure without expenditure. It is also an adventure; once you slow down you will see new routes that you never saw before and maybe take them, read new invitations to enter chapels or private libraries or rarely opened spaces, you will have encounters. Your own mind, in the space left open by slowing down, will begin to make its own suggestions, casting you in different roles, setting you at the mercy of various narratives, real and fanciful. You will begin to suspect how things work here, who moves what, where the boundaries are; rather than just getting through as quickly and efficiently as possible you will begin to ‘own’ these spaces; they will become parts of a new ‘realm’ for you; both imaginary and always available. You will see things and places as you have never seen them before. You may see you as you have never seen yourself before.

Phil Smith

When walking, we notice details lost to the rush of wheels and the forced separation of glass and metal. Walkers are free to follow avenues of interest, to pursue curiosity, to circumnavigate sites and buildings, climb obstacles and generally get into the stuff of place.

Walking also engenders thoughtfulness. Walkers ruminate. Walking allows us to question and clarify: to unknot, as well as generate, ideas.

Walking streets and heritage sites gives us a tangible relationship with those places. We can feel the ground under our feet, touch walls, peer through windows, poke and pry. Psychogeography, defined by Guy Debord as ‘the study of the specific effects of the geographic environment…on the emotions and behaviour’, is one way of looking at place and our relationship with it. Taking on a little psychogeographical attitude when we walk can make us more attentive to the sites and streets we encounter every day, and what they have to offer us.


Be mindful of traffic, rivers, steep banks, railway tracks and other people. Stay safe, but not comfortable. By walking and encountering Sandwich in new ways, you will find those hidden nuggets of history, the layers of time surrounding you, the surprising in the familiar.

Sonia Overall

Here are some ideas to help you walk this way...
Reflective walking
Take a pocket mirror with you when you visit the streets and sites of Sandwich. Every now and then, pause to see what the mirror reveals about what is behind, beside or above you. Use your mirror to look at small details and out-of-reach spaces, or at the ceilings and alcoves of buildings.

Long and short
Look for a building with ‘long’ in its name. Find the shortest route from there to Short Street. How many steps from one to the other?

Bridges
Starting at the Barbican, walk in a circuit around and/or through the town, crossing as many bridges as you can. Footbridges, roads across streams and planks over rivulets all count. How many can you cross without using the same bridge twice? How many different qualities in the water do you see? How many different words do you have to describe them?

Mismapping: overmapping
Starting at the Guildhall bus stop, navigate the streets of Sandwich using the bus route to Ramsgate as your map. Look out for landmarks: the towers of the Discovery Centre, the distant lumps of Richborough, the Viking Ship at Pegwell Bay. When you arrive at the seaside, treat yourself to chips and ice cream.

New Name for No Name
Spend a few minutes in No Name Street. Watch the activities of people and urban wildlife, traffic (if any), and take a good look at the buildings, walls, doorways, pavements… Listen carefully. Use your nose. Based on what you see, hear and smell, come up with a new name for No Name Street. Rename more things. Rename yourself. Invent a renaming ceremony.

Sensory walks
Follow your nose: let smell lead you from one place to the next. Be receptive to scents that present themselves. Seek out smells. Give yourself permission to sniff deeply in shops. Capture the scents of riverside, urban planting and overhanging foliage.

Navigate the town using touch. Stroke surfaces. Run your hand along edges. Lean against buildings. Feel for areas of warmth and cold.

Shift your eye level: don’t restrict your vision to head height. Take a whole walk looking at the ground, at the level of your knees, or up at rooflines and tree canopies.

Listen. Really listen. When you are out walking, find a good place to stop, close your eyes and tune in. Keep as still as you can. List in your head at least 20 different sounds you can hear – start with your breathing. Listen for layers of sound, for the close and the distant. What do the sounds tell you about this particular place? How would this place have sounded 50, 100 or 400 years ago? Or 400 million years?
Wall walking
Negotiate the town using walls rather than paths as your guide. Seek out palimpsest. What new poems or images are created by the fading or ripping of top layers? Look for layers of history in the patchworks of brick, stone, flint and recycled materials. (Lively walls can be found at Hogs Corner near The Salutation, and Guildcount Lane near Harnet Street.) Consider how many mysteries there are — how did the rocks here form, where were the bricks made, who ordered these walls built, what are they intended to keep in or keep out?

Mismapping: dots and lines
Draw some random dots on a map of Sandwich — as many as you like. Starting at a dot, walk from one place to the next, joining the dots as you go.

Draw a shape or simple pattern on your map and follow the lines through the streets. See if you notice anything new when you walk like this. Try not to cheat. Walk with an idea, follow any sign of it, then turn your discovered route in a map: is there any connection to the idea in the shape you took?

Coin flip
Take a walk with a coin in your pocket. When you reach a junction, flip a coin: heads you turn right, tails you turn left. Try this around the close, Y-shaped streets and alleys of Sandwich town centre. Then keep going. Spend the coin (maybe best if you use a £1) and let whatever you buy lead you — if it’s a chocolate bar follow or seek out sweetness, if a box of matches follow the warmest or the brightest, if a toy seek playfulness.

Colour trail
Look for a colour: a red object in a shop window, a green door, a blue-edged sign. Walk up to it, and look for the next object in that colour. Keep following the colour: see how far it can take you, and what its presence in the town can tell you. Map the colour routes one on top of the other — does a pattern emerge?

Arches, gates and portals
Navigate Sandwich using its many arches and portals. Pass through gates ancient and modern: the Barbican, Fisher Gate, the Guildhall arch. Seek out the sites where town gates once stood, at the points where streets meet the old walls: Sandown Gate on Sandown Road; Newgate on New Street; Woodnesborough Gate on Moat Sole; Canterbury Gate on Strand Street. Look for blocked portals, bricked-up doors and windows to nowhere.

Once you have a sense of where the portals are, use them as a means of changing your mood, training yourself to change from one mood to another as you pass through each portal. Compose your own emotion symphony; become an emotional virtuoso.
Walking Sideways with families

Children are natural psychogeographers. Turn walking into a game and you’ll have trouble keeping up.
Let the youngest child choose which direction to go.

Street Names

How many posts can you find in Seven Post Alley?
Tell a spooky story in Holy Ghost Alley.

What other street names can you play with?

Make up the story of how your favourite Sandwich street got its name. Then research it, and find out if you were right. Which version do you prefer?

Go Roman

Visit Richborough Roman fort and have a picnic in the grounds. Take some cushions to recline on and feed each other grapes. Stage an impromptu play or hold some (friendly) gladiatorial games. See if you can access the ancient amphitheatre in the nearby field (beware sheep).

Toy tourists

Take a pocket-sized toy or action figure on a walk around town. Use your toy as a miniature investigator. Let them climb walls and explore ledges, nooks and crannies that you can’t fit into. (Don’t leave them behind.) What do you think they might see that you can’t?

Heritage Scavenger Hunt

Go for a walk and ‘collect’:
• a lion doorknocker
• two stone archways
• the sound of a bell chiming
• a wall with flint in it
• a house with a strange name
• a statue
• three Sandwich town crests
• a footpath sign
• a boot scraper
• reflections in water (don’t get too close…)

Searching for surfaces

Take some crayons and paper with you when you walk and use them to make rubbings of interesting surfaces. Capture graffiti carved into church pillars, bolts or studs on old gates, plaques, gnarled doorposts, ancient-looking tree trunks, tombstones, slabs. What do these different surfaces feel like when you touch them? When you get home, lay out your papers and see if you can recognise the surfaces by looking at the rubbings. Cut them up and stick them together in a collage-map of Sandwich textures.
'Nothing happened here'
Can you find the spot where nothing happened in 1782? (Clue: it's not far from the library). When you've found the plaque, make up an event or incident that you wish had happened here.
Seek out places where you think the least happens. Make a map of most and least intensities of happening in Sandwich.

On safari
Look for animals on house plaques, door knockers, pub and shop signs, or displayed in windows. Take a camera or sketchbook with you to record sightings. Walk and look and feel in the persona of an animal: a heron, a snake, a spider, a giraffe. Don’t try to walk like them – or maybe very subtly – but try to see through their eyes, feel through their desires.

Rooftop kingdom
Some of the buildings in Sandwich have fascinating roofs. Joining these up makes a whole skyline, a raised town above the streets. Find a roof that interests you and imagine what it would be like to live up there. Sketch out a plan of the roof, design a roof garden for it, or draw what you think the view might be like from the tallest point. Make a map to connect all the roofs and balconies with walkways.

Heritage maths
Look for dates on buildings and add them up in different ways to make new dates. For example, if you spotted 1601 and 1532, you could get 3133 (1601+1532), or 19 (1+6+0+1+1+5+3+2), or 811 (1+6+0+1: 1+5+3+2) … and so on. Imagine the area where Sandwich now stands in 19 BC, or 811 AD. What might it be like in 3133 AD?
Make your own numerological chart, giving 1 to 9 different qualities. Then add up the number of a building (or an identity number, or a ticket code) and give it that quality, always reducing the numbers down to a single numeral. So 1601 = 8, 1988 = 26 = 8 and so on.

Secret spaces
There are many secret gardens and hidden alleys in Sandwich. Next time you pass or visit one, share a secret with the space. Whisper it to a wall. Make up a secret that someone else may have left there. Listen for the whispers.

Here be monsters
Go dragon hunting. Seek out fabulous creatures on old buildings and churches. Make up their myths. Draw your favourites. How did these monsters end up in Sandwich? Are they friendly? What do they eat? What kind of monster are you?
Celebrate your own heritage site

No walk today? Never mind – stay at home and celebrate your own heritage site.

Find out how old your house is and have a birthday party in its honour. How many candles will you need on the cake? And how are you going to manage the bumps?

Hold an opening ceremony for your house. Mount an archaeological dig in a flowerbed. Treat the view from a bedroom window as if it were a famous landscape painting. Give it a title and name its creator and install a plaque by the side of the vista.

Treat your home or bedroom like a museum. Give your friends and family a guided tour. Choose some artefacts to display and make up their histories. Create signs if you like, and tickets for visitors. Don’t forget the shop and café.

Create a miniature heritage site in your home. Construct a Lego Guildhall, cardboard church or shoebox museum. Make Roman remains in your garden or windowbox using stones and pebbles. Get mini-figures to work as attendants or visit as tourists. Open your heritage attraction to curious passing insects.

Look out for ‘fake’ heritage or sacred sites – like the ‘standing stones’ in a children’s playground, or pyramid decorations in an ‘Amusement Centre’ – and treat them as if they were real. Maybe that will make them real...
...maybe this is how the real ones started out.

Walking bingo

Before your walk, make a list of things to spot and tick them off as you go. To make your walk into a game, make a slightly different list for each player. Good things to include on your list are door numbers, urban wildlife, trees and types of signage.
Sonia Overall is a novelist, poet and academic interested in the relationship between self and place, walking and ideation. She uses psychogeographical techniques and labyrinths in her writing and teaching, and her chapbook The Art of Walking is a collection of responses to movement and place. She is a lecturer in Creative Writing at Canterbury Christ Church University and the founder and curator of the Women Who Walk network for academics and creatives.

www.soniaoverall.net
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Phil Smith, aka Crab Man, is the father of ‘Mythogeography’ and a founder member of Wrights & Sites, a group of site-specific artist-researchers. Phil comes from a background in performance and music theatre, working as a writer and dramaturg. He has published numerous books and academic articles, performed and mis-led walks at festivals and is a visiting lecturer at the University of Plymouth and the University of Exeter.

www.mythogeography.com
www.mis-guide.com

Look further

Theory...


Practice...

Qualmann, Clare and Hind, Claire. Ways to Wander. Triarchy Press, 2015


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