

Rochester Church Circles (brief introduction to the project):

You may of course choose to use the walks simply as they stand as one-offs, without reference to the structure of the project.

But if you would like to understand my admittedly rather quirky thinking in devising them, read on!

The project

These walks are part of a long-term project, which, if all goes well, will unfold over several years.

It is a rather fanciful concept, but I hope that, at least in part, it will be of interest to some.

It has yielded walks of four different types:

1 The Full Circuits

We are familiar with the idea of sponsored events, some of which involve people visiting a series of churches - typically on bicycles. They were the inspiration behind the structure of this pedestrians' version (whether or not people actually decide to use them for such events).

There are 256 Anglican churches in the Rochester diocese *. The project aims (eventually!) to include each one of them in at least one circular route of around 12 miles, linking it with, typically, three or four others. I'm calling each of these circular routes 'full circuits'.

* ... or at least there were when I started. I don't think I can manage the flexibility to keep up with the occasional reorganisations and closures which will inevitably occur! The pace of change should not be enough to seriously invalidate the project, though people who are more up to date than I am might like to instigate local tweaks to some of the detail.

2 The Spine

From the outset I decided to do one further thing, namely to link each of these circuits together. So there will in effect be a spine (though a deformed, zigzag-shape spine in truth) from which all the circuits wander off and to which they return. [The rough draft of this spine is currently something like: Ashurst - Anerley - Belvedere - Lamberhurst - Grain - Rochester, but this will doubtless change as I discover realities on the ground.]

What this means is that each of the full circuits (as above) will include a section of the spine (typically two or three miles). And, as a spin-off, **there will be, if anyone is so inclined, the possibility of walking a meandering diocese-tour, putting just those spine sections together: not, in that case, passing anything like all the churches, but engaging in a progress through many different scenes in our varied diocese.**

3 The Shortened Circuits

In talking about the full circuits, I've found some people unreservedly enthusiastic about them, but others wishing they we're 'just a bit shorter'!

So I've compromised, and also suggested, as alternatives, shortened circuits of about 8 miles. **Corresponding to each of the full circuits there will be a 'shortened circuit' using the same**

spine section, but somewhere along the route finding a quicker way 'home'. This means, in the nature of the compromise, that not all churches are visited by these shortened circuits – but most still will be.

4 The Local Walks

And I've also been asked for still shorter walks; so have adopted a different approach to produce these. **I'm aiming to include every church in at least one 'local walk' of around 5 miles. In most cases these routes will link to one nearby church, or possibly two or more; but occasionally this will not work, simply because of the distances involved in some rural areas. I'll do my best!**

SUMMARY

So in each sector (i.e. group of routes and churches associated with a particular spine section) there will be a full circuit, a shortened circuit and a number of local walks, each written up as a separate document.

All the walks are circuits. The starting points have been chosen with some consideration of possible parking places, but can of course be varied ad lib. within the circuits. They link churches as described above – more or less.

I say 'more or less' because sometimes the 'natural' spine route passes near but not directly past the church. In this event I have described the basic circuit without reference to the building and either noted (as a detour) the way to it in the course of the walk, or else made that church a start/finish point with a 'spur' leading to and from the circuit itself.

It may of course be that your interest is not particularly in going to the actual churches, but in the walks for their own sake: if so, simply ignore any such detours or spurs.

And if your aim is indeed to visit the buildings be aware that of course they might not be open throughout the day; though actually a pleasingly large number seem to be.

Because of the constraints I've imposed on myself as above, there will be occasions on which the routes go through unlovely places to bring walks of reasonable length to the required destinations. (I'm actually pleasantly surprised by how seldom this has happened so far.) In the introductory paragraphs I make no attempt to 'sell' them as something better than they are: I just offer my own (subjective) thoughts.

The whole project is, as will be obvious, 'work in progress'. I've made a good start in researching the routes, but I find each one takes as long to write up as it does to walk, and any sketch maps I produce will add more time; so there will always be a backlog. I dare not try to quantify what I meant above by 'several years', but it will be a good while!

John Harding
April 2015