



EXPLORING KENT'S HERITAGE

a guide for parents and teachers
of children with autism

David Blakesley and Tone Blakesley

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www.autismandnature.org.uk

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Authors' Foreword and Acknowledgements

Our guide sets out to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions with Kent's heritage. Kent has some fantastic historic and cultural heritage places to visit, including museums, castles, Roman forts, heritage steam railways and a working windmill. We have included twenty-four places, but we visited many more, and we were spoilt for choice over places to include in the guide!

Whilst the guide does not provide solutions to the many difficulties associated with autism, it does seek to offer appropriate information to make visits to the heritage places featured as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be accessed by all the family. Where possible, we have selected heritage places that are located in the countryside, by the sea, or set in gardens, which offer calm places for children to retire to during a visit. The description of each location should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child. Preparation for a visit to a new place can also be very important. Many children with autism appreciate being shown pictures of their destination, so we have included photographs in the guide that we hope children will find attractive. Many of the places featured require dogs to be kept on leads, whilst several only allow assistance dogs, which may help children who fear dogs.

The guide has been generously funded by the Big Lottery Fund. We are grateful to Andrew Powling and Peter Buckley for reviewing and proof reading the text. We would also like to thank all the organisations who own and/or manage the heritage places featured in this guide, for kindly providing comments on our descriptions of their sites. We would especially like to thank Kent Autistic Trust and Includes Us 2 for their help with the distribution of this guide.

We are also indebted to Peter and Barbara Creed (Pisces Publications) for the original design of our guides; the layout was undertaken by Tone Blakesley. Photographs were taken by David Blakesley with additional photographs by Tone Blakesley.

Part 1 Introduction

This guide will help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions, and their families, with Kent's historical and cultural heritage. For many children, outings to heritage places may not feature in their everyday lives, yet these can be inspiring and fun places for any child to visit. If your child enjoys visiting a particular place, it could become a cherished memory, a special place for them, offering comfort and relaxation as well as learning.

Museums may have interactive exhibits that children can touch, smell or listen to that will inspire and help them to engage with Kent's heritage. The Union Mill for example is a working windmill where, on a windy day, children may see sweeps turning and grain being ground. Some heritage places have information and fun activities for schools that might also help parents and carers to support a visit with their child. Check websites for information on educational activities for schools or contact the education officer. Many children with autism have special interests, and certain places featured in this guide might appeal more than others. For example, there are places that would appeal to children interested in the Romans (Lullingstone Roman Villa and Richborough Roman Fort); boats (The Historic Dockyard Chatham); aircraft (the Spitfire and Hurricane Museum); fossils (Folkestone Museum); and castles (Dover and Deal). For children with autism who are interested in trains, there are five heritage railways in Kent. We have included two in this guide, Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway and the Kent & East Sussex Railway. The other railways include the East Kent Railway at Shepherdswell; Spa Valley Railway in Tunbridge Wells; and the Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway. There is also a private line, the Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway on the North Downs. In addition, the Elham Valley Railway Museum is a quiet but fascinating place to visit with children. Visits to heritage places might inspire children to find new interests, perhaps in some of the examples listed above. Visits might also be beneficial to a child's social skills and well-being.

Blacksmith tools - Agricultural Museum Brook



Location

Finding suitable heritage places to visit can be challenging and it can be difficult to anticipate problems that might arise when walking around a museum or country house with a child with autism. Many of the heritage places selected for inclusion in this guide are in a rural location, by the sea, or have their own gardens. These places offer families the opportunity of somewhere quiet to go if a child becomes overwhelmed during a visit. For example, families visiting Stoneacre or Down House can relax in quiet, calming gardens. Visitors to the museums in Deal, or Deal Castle, can stroll along the shingle beach with their child, whilst visitors to Reculver Towers can walk along the Saxon Shore Way or follow the cliff top path through the country park. Other locations such as Richborough Roman Fort, Smallhythe Place and Lullingstone Roman Villa are located in the countryside. Whilst most of our featured places have quiet spaces within them, or nearby where parents can retire to if a child becomes anxious during their visit, Folkestone Museum is located in a busy town centre; others such as The Historic Dockyard Chatham and Dover Castle may be very busy at certain times or the year.

Planning your visit

Visiting a heritage place for the first time represents a change in routine that might cause anxiety for any child with autism. There might be sensory elements of the experience that some children find challenging; in museums for example, parents might be concerned about lighting (too bright, too dim or transitions between the two); sound (from videos for example); interactive displays; or the presence of mannequins (some with a recorded voice). Whether a place is busy at certain times

Richborough Roman Fort



might be particularly important. Some children with autism may express particular anxieties before a visit, such as: how far will they have to walk; will they get back in time for the next activity; will it be noisy; will there be dogs off lead; and so on. We hope that the information provided in the guide about these, and many other issues will help parents and carers to judge the suitability of the featured places for their child and, critically, help with planning and preparing their child, as best they can, for a visit to a new place. This should allow any concerns to be managed or avoided, to give a child the best chance of enjoying the experience.

For any child, there may be real risks associated with a new environment, such as steps or ladders to climb, unprotected machinery, open water and so on. For each of the places included in the guide, in both the information bar and the accompanying text, we have highlighted issues such as these, and other concerns that parents and carers might have, for example: quiet areas in which to relax; how busy the venue is; areas that might over stimulate or overwhelm a child; and so on. However, autism is a spectrum disorder and every child is different, so there may be other issues that are not covered in this book, or on the website of the venue. As with any activity, we recommend that parents, carers and teachers assess the risks of any visit.

If parents or carers are concerned about a particular place, a family member could visit first to assess its suitability for their child. This would be a good opportunity to take photographs or make a short video to show a child. Alternatively, parents could make a visual schedule to illustrate a forthcoming visit. We hope that the photographs in this guide can also be shown to children ahead of their visit to a particular place and recommend that parents look at the websites with their child, especially those that are well illustrated. If making a pre-visit is difficult, readers should consult the information in this book, visit the website, and telephone the venue if necessary with any specific queries or concerns, such as the dates of special events, which could ruin a visit if a place is very busy on a particular day.

Quiet space – a traditional orchard at Smallhythe Place



Here are a few tips on how to prepare for an outing to a heritage place with your child, pupil or friend with autism. Careful planning means that, as far as possible, you can select suitable locations, avoid the unexpected and reduce anxiety for a child with autism. For example:

- Use visual supports and timetables to prepare a child before the outing; the photographs in this guide and photographs or videos on the website of the venue might help
- A sketch map of a walk might be helpful – you could estimate how long to go from one stage to another, for example “in so many minutes we will be back at the entrance”
- Check the distance to be walked, the terrain and whether there are any steep steps
- Check if interactive exhibits are suitable for your child
- Check on the availability of refreshments and toilets
- Consider visiting at quieter times (contact the venue)
- Check if there are quieter areas to escape noise, too many people, etc.
- Check if there are areas that would be best avoided, due to noise, challenging lighting or number of visitors
- Do the necessary risk assessments – essential if you are a support worker
- Have a plan in case your child becomes separated from you
- Have some games to play or activities that you can do whilst walking around.

Planning a visit can help to minimise stress and make a visit relaxing and enjoyable, that might otherwise have been daunting. We hope that this guide and the accounts of the heritage places will help to achieve this.

Finally, we recommend families visit the Wheels of Time website (<http://wheelsoftime.uk>), a partnership of museums and heritage sites in Kent dedicated to promoting children’s learning about their historical heritage. Places participating in the scheme, including some of those featured in this guide, offer individual badges for children to collect when they visit.

14th century barn housing the Agricultural Museum Brook



Part 2 Heritage places to visit in Kent

Kent is known as the 'Garden of England', but it also has a rich historical and cultural heritage. Fortifications at Dover Castle for example are thought to date back to the Iron Age, but the earliest preserved structure on the site is a magnificent Roman lighthouse. This would have guided ships into the port of Dubris, although it is further up the coast that the Romans first landed in Britain, at Richborough in AD 43. Here you can visit the remains of the Roman Fort and the town of Rutupiae. Children interested in the Romans might also enjoy a visit to Lullingstone Roman Villa. After the Romans had left our shores, St Augustine's Abbey was founded in Canterbury in 598, although the ruined buildings were extensively remodelled following the Norman conquest. Eynsford Castle was built just 20 years after the Norman conquest.

Other places featured in this guide date back to medieval times, including Dover Castle and the moated old English Manor House of Ightham Mote. Stoneacre is a timber-framed house that was built at the end of the 15th century, as Britain entered the 'Modern Period'. The guide also features many places that will provide children with an opportunity to learn about life in more recent times. The Agricultural Museum at Brook for example, although housed in a medieval barn, has a large collection of agricultural equipment from more recent times; children can also walk around an oast house that retains many of its original features. Other remarkable museums that might interest families, include those in Cranbrook and Deal. Children fascinated by steam might enjoy a visit to the Elham Valley Railway Museum or one of Kent's heritage railways. Others might prefer to visit the working windmill in Cranbrook, sit in a fire engine at the Kent Firefighting Museum or explore the aircraft collections in the museums at Manston.

Before visiting the places featured in this guide, we recommend readers look at the relevant websites. Many include leaflets or maps and details of public transport. Some have educational resources for schools that might prove useful for families. More information to help plan journeys by public transport is available from Kent County Council, including Community Transport such as 'Kent Karrier', a dial-a-ride service that travels to set locations; and 'Involve', which provides voluntary transport in the Maidstone and Malling area for those who cannot manage on public transport. Information on public transport is also available from traveline south east (www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk).

Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway steam locomotive



- On Luxted Road, 0.3 miles south of Downe on the minor road to Single Street, off the A21 or A233 (BR6 7JT)

- Public transport: buses from Orpington (Mon to Sat) stop outside Down House; buses from Bromley to Downe village (Mon to Sun), with a 500 m walk, 300 m of which is along a narrow lane with no pavement

- Open daily (Apr to Oct); weekends and some week days (Nov to Mar) (check website for details); admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members); free car park (80 m to the house and garden)

- Visitor reception and gift shop in the main house; accessible toilets and tearoom; picnic tables in the garden

- Terrain: wheelchair access in the house and most of the garden (compact gravel paths); stairs or lift to first floor; further access information on the website; typical walk around the garden up to 500 m; the Sandwalk is an additional 700 m

- Lighting in some rooms is subdued; video on a loop in one room only

- Quiet space: extensive gardens

- Assistance dogs only

- Children's quiz available in reception; education room for children and dressing up closet; hand-held audio tour guides available (free).

Home of Charles Darwin (Down House)

a very special place...

Down House was the home of Charles Darwin, from 1842 until his death some 40 years later. Many children with autism may find it a fascinating place to visit. The house is furnished as it was when Darwin lived here, and you can wander through the rooms to see how he lived, exploring various exhibitions along the way about his life and work. Down House is set in extensive gardens that Darwin viewed as his 'outdoor laboratory', and which today offer many quiet spaces for any child who finds the indoor exhibitions overwhelming.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Charles Darwin's theories on evolution that have shaped scientific thought since the publication of his seminal work 'On the Origin of Species' in 1859. When you enter Down House, you will be directed upstairs to the 'Introducing Darwin room' (note that there are two cases of taxidermy bird specimens in the corridor that some families might choose to avoid). Here, children can touch objects such as rocks, shells, crystals and coral (note there is a video with a commentary in this room). Some children may have learnt about Charles Darwin at school, and how he and Alfred Wallace developed their ideas on evolution. They may already know that Darwin embarked on a five year voyage around the world on board HMS Beagle when he was 22 years old. The ship was captained by Robert Fitzroy, with Darwin assuming the role of naturalist, spending a lot of his time onshore. One of the rooms in Down House shows the route of

Down House (Tone Blakesley)



the voyage on a large map of the world, together with a model of HMS Beagle and artefacts from the voyage, including Darwin's microscope and telescope. Darwin's cabin has been recreated in the next room; you can look in and see a 'projected image' of Darwin working at a large table, though some children might find this a little disconcerting. The discovery suite includes a large globe, models of insects and dinosaurs, and giant dominoes and chess pieces. A closet area in Darwin's bedroom has Victorian clothes to try on. Returning to the ground floor, you will find the dining room, billiard room, drawing room and perhaps most important of all, Darwin's study. You can almost imagine him walking through the door!

The gardens are delightful, looking much as they would have done in Darwin's time. Close to the house is a sundial, and a mulberry tree that was fruiting when Darwin was in residence. Compacted gravel paths lead past large areas of lawn where children can run around, and flower borders with traditional cottage garden flowers in summer. Darwin constructed a greenhouse and 'laboratory' where he carried out his own experiments. Children might find the greenhouse particularly interesting, because it has a fine collection of insectivorous plants which Darwin found fascinating. Point out the Venus flytrap, pitcher plants (see below) and sundews and explain to your child that these plants predate insects! Walk through to the potting shed or 'laboratory' which now houses a special observation hide where children can watch bees 'busy' in a hive through a glass screen. Beyond the greenhouse is the kitchen garden; in the summer you can look for vegetables that your child eats at home!

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/

Pitcher plants



Darwin's greenhouse (Tone Blakesley)



- Follow the brown tourist signs from the A225 in Eynsford (DA4 0JA)
- Public transport: buses from Swanley to Sevenoaks (Mon to Sat) and Dartford to West Kingsdown (Sun only) stop on the A225 in Eynsford (1.4 km from the villa, along a minor road with no pavement); regular trains (Sevenoaks to London) stop at Eynsford Station (2 km from the villa)
- Open daily in summer; weekends from Nov to Mar (check website for details); admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members); busy car park (free for English Heritage members)
- Visitor reception with drinks machine and accessible toilets
- Terrain: wheelchair access throughout the building housing the ruined villa; stairs to first floor (lift available); slight incline from car park to reception; walkway around the ruins is protected by a guard fence; steep grassy bank outside
- Subdued lighting; coloured lights illuminate ruins; lighting lowered significantly every 30 mins for a short audiovisual presentation
- Unfenced river adjacent to the car park
- Assistance dogs only in the museum
- Educational resources (for schools) on the website might be useful.

Lullingstone Roman Villa

an excellent introduction to Roman history...

Any child interested in history, especially Roman history, should be very excited to visit Lullingstone. A single modern building houses the ruins of a Roman villa, built around AD 75-100, and thought to have been owned by successive wealthy people until it was abandoned in the mid-4th century. Entry to the villa is via a small shop, which might be distracting for some children with autism. Once you leave the shop however, you will immediately find yourself on a concrete walkway that surrounds the ruined walls and rooms of the villa. For children who are sensitive to changes in lighting, or loud noises, you should be aware that the lighting is very subdued and coloured, and that every 30 minutes, a short video is projected onto a screen above the ruins. At this time, the lights are dimmed even more, and the video – which presents a fascinating account of the villa – has a commentary. Explain to your child that the original villa was modest in construction, but it was extended substantially over the following 250 years or so and may eventually have been the home of a provincial Governor, or perhaps a wealthy farmer. All the rooms are labelled, and colourful display boards around the walkway give more information about the rooms, and the people who might have lived in them. A large board close to the entrance shows a plan of the villa and the different phases of development. However, you could download a similar plan from the English Heritage website before you visit, for your child to look at as you walk around.

Roman villa (Tone Blakesley)



On the far side of the villa, the rare and well-preserved mosaic floors of the dining room and 'audience chamber' can be viewed from the walkway, which is wider on this side of the building. A table is set out with various patterns from the mosaic, on to which children can place small pieces of coloured magnets to create their own mosaics. A touch table allows children to handle Roman building materials including a house brick, roofing tiles and Tesserae cubes which were used for creating mosaic floors. A dressing up area allows children to put on clothes – over their own clothes – that Romans might have worn. There is also a table set out with a Roman board game, rather like backgammon, that might interest some children with autism. A number of display cases show artefacts of Roman life, such as pottery, tools, cutlery and a balance. You should be aware that the skeletons of a 24 year old man, a baby and a dog are also on display in this area. Colourful posters show how the inhabitants of the villa would have lived, for example one poster illustrates servants preparing a meal for the owners of the villa.

The villa and the car park can be busy at weekends and during school holidays. If you need some quiet time, you can walk from the car park across the bridge over the River Darent and follow the track towards the farm for at least 200 m. Horses and ponies are likely to be grazing in the fields. Alternatively, you can follow the minor road towards Lullingstone Country Park. This is a popular walk, past further fields used for grazing horses, but it is also used by vehicles. If you wish to walk into the park itself, a map of the park that includes the Roman villa can be downloaded from the park website.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/lullingstone-roman-villa/

Model of the 4th century villa



Roman building materials



- In the village of Eynsford off the A225 – follow the narrow lane signposted to the Village Hall to the car park (DA4 0AA)
- Public transport: buses from Swanley to Sevenoaks (Mon to Sat) and Dartford to West Kingsdown (Sun only) stop on the A225 in Eynsford, 120 m from the castle; regular trains on the Sevenoaks to London line stop at Eynsford Station (station is 1 km from the castle, pavement along a busy road, which must be crossed in several places)
- Open daily (closed over Christmas period), free admission and car park
- No facilities; accessible toilets in Lullingstone Roman Villa during opening hours (1 mile)
- Terrain: bridge across moat into the ruins; grassy paths with loose gravel surfaces, uneven in places; steps into some of the rooms and down to the riverside meadow; typical walk around the castle and down to the river 300 m
- Unfenced river close to the castle; one hole in the wall above the moat is protected with a wire fence
- Quiet space: almost anywhere across the site
- Dogs may be encountered off lead
- Several information panels; history of the castle on the English Heritage website.

Eynsford Castle

a quiet ruined castle to explore...

Eynsford Castle is a small, relatively quiet place that should interest families with a child with autism, especially if a family member is interested in history. The car park is immediately adjacent to the impressive curtain wall, which is 2 m wide at its base, and survives to its original height of 9 m. Access to the castle ruins is via a wooden bridge that crosses the moat where the castle drawbridge would once have been. You can still see the foundations of the gatehouse as you enter the castle. The English Heritage website has a plan of the castle, together with an illustration of how the inner Hall would have looked in the 12th century.

Explain to your child that this is a Norman castle, built just 20 years after the Norman Conquest of 1066. The Hall, which was constructed inside the castle walls in the 12th century, was the home of the de Eynsford family. Unfortunately, the Hall was vandalised in the early 14th century and never lived in again, but its ruined walls still remain, and you can explore various rooms, including the kitchens and cellars. Look out for the fireplace in the cellar. If you look closely at the walls, you will see that they have been constructed using flint; if your child has an interest in fossils, you might suggest that they look closely at the flint, to see if they can find the fossilised remains of a sea urchin in the walls. The River Darent is just 30 m from the ruins, down a flight of steps and across a meadow. You can walk along the river bank for about 90 m within the castle grounds. From here you can look out across open countryside towards Eynsford Hill. You could combine a visit to the castle with a visit to nearby Lullingstone Roman Villa, also featured in this guide.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/eynsford-castle/

Castle ruins



- The museum is within Woodlands Garden Centre; on Ash Lane, just off the A20, between Wrotham and West Kingsdown (TN15 7EG)

- No suitable public transport

- Open daily (mid Mar to mid Dec) except Easter Sunday, admission free; garden centre car park free, 150 m from the museum

- Toilets and disabled toilet in the garden centre; museum café open Fri, Sat and Sun (Apr to Sep); Garden Centre restaurant open daily (inside and outside seating); several picnic tables in a quiet space outside the museum

- Real fire engine to climb onboard and small 'fire engine' climbing frame

- Terrain: generally firm, level surfaces around the garden centre and museum offering good wheelchair access

- Blue flashing light outside the museum and the sound of fire engine sirens in the background playing on a loop

- Mannequins in the museum

- Quiet space: picnic benches under trees outside the museum

- Dogs should be on a lead

- Colouring sheets, free fire safety literature and activity sheet available in the museum; videos about the fire service and Fireman Sam can be watched in the Education Centre.

Kent Firefighting Museum

climb onboard a real fire engine...

This is an unusual location for a museum, situated under mature trees at the back of a large garden centre. Parents should be aware that the garden centre, which you have to walk through to reach the museum, can be busy, particularly on sunny spring and summer weekends.

There are of course many distractions along the way, as you walk first through the shop and then into open areas where plants are set out. However, some children may enjoy looking at the flowers, water garden and bonsai trees. Signs direct you towards the museum itself which is often more peaceful. As you approach the museum, the first thing your child will see is a Dennis Rapier fire engine parked under the trees. Children can climb on board and sit in the driver's seat, or the rear seats where the firemen sit; they can wear a fireman's helmet, pretend to drive the vehicle and play with a fire hose; surely a highlight of any child's visit! This might be popular with parents too!

The museum has several small buildings to look around; one of which is packed with artefacts related to the fire service. These include several old fire appliances, a model fire escape ladder and a model of the fireboat 'Fireflair' that was stationed on the River Thames, serving both Kent and Essex. There are also several display cases of model fire engines and an impressive collection of over 100 helmets, some of them traditional 'brass' helmets. A replica fire station next to the main building houses a horse drawn steam fire engine that was in service in Kent from 1897 to 1919. Volunteer guides, often ex-firemen, will show you around and provide information about the exhibits and talk to children about the fire service. Families can also select and view films about the history of the fire service and firefighting in Kent, as well as several 'Fireman Sam' films in the Education Centre.

www.kentfirefightingmuseum.org.uk

www.woodlandsgc.co.uk

Fire engine



Firefighting museum



- From the A25 east of Sevenoaks or the A227 north of Tonbridge, follow the brown signs to Ightham Mote (TN15 0NT)

- Public transport: Go-Coach bus from Sevenoaks (Mon to Fri)

- House open Mar to end Oct and Dec; gardens open all year (except Christmas); admission charge (free for two carers and National Trust members); large pay-and-display car park (free for National Trust members)

- Accessible toilets and café; picnic area off the main car park and beyond the North Lake (deckchairs available May to Oct)

- Natural play area at the far end of the garden (280 m from house)

- Terrain: 1:5 slope along the path from the Visitor Centre to the house (60 m), avoided by alternative setting down point (ask at reception); uneven floors, steps and stairs in the house; gardens have undulating gravel and grass paths, steep in places (map of level access paths available at reception); detailed access statement on website; typical walk around the house and gardens 1 km

- Courtesy shuttle bus from the Visitor Centre to the house

- Quiet space: extensive gardens

- Several unfenced ponds and small lake; moat protected by walls of varying heights

- Assistance dogs only

- Child's garden explorer map available from the Visitor Centre.

Ightham Mote

a striking, moated manor house...

Children might associate moats with castles, but here they will find an old English manor house enclosed by water. There are natural springs close by that ensure the moat does not dry up. You might ask your child why a family home would need to have its own moat? The house is striking when you first see it, constructed from local Kentish ragstone and surrounded by water. Explain to your child that the oldest part of the house was constructed sometime in the middle of the 14th century; it was transformed in the 1400s to a larger, courtyard house, and has been refurbished over the centuries as fashions changed. Walking around the house takes you on a journey through the history of English country houses.

Despite the passing of time, the house retains many of its original features. As you cross the bridge to reach the courtyard, look out for the enormous kennel en route. Ask your child how many rooms they think the house might have – amazingly it has over 70 rooms! Perhaps the most spectacular of these is the Great Hall, the second room you will come to on your tour of the house. Explain to your child that this was at the heart of the original house. It would have had an earthen floor and an open fire, and been used to entertain visitors. Imagine travelling minstrels performing here for the family and their guests. Looking down on proceedings would have been the ‘green man’ – a carving of a face surrounded by leaves – see if you can spot him or ask

Ightham Mote (Tone Blakesley)



the guide stationed in the hall. The signposted route around the house takes you through many other rooms on the ground and first floor. The Butler's Pantry might interest some children. It has a 'walk-in' strong room that would have housed the 'family silver'; electric bell indicators to summon the butler to rooms all over the house; and even a drop-down bed in one of the cupboards for the footman. Close by, also in the servant's quarters, is the Crypt, thought to have changed little over the centuries. Above the crypt, on the first floor is the Old Chapel, also part of the original 14th century building. The floorboards creak loudly as you walk over them, perhaps a sign of the great age of this room! As you walk through the other upstairs rooms, be sure to look out for the Victoria Cross on display in the New Chapel. This is the highest military honour in Britain, and was awarded to Thomas Riversdale Colyer-Fergusson, whose family lived in Ightham Mote. The Drawing Room on the first floor was a later addition to the house and is dominated by an enormous fireplace. It might reflect the owner's desire for a more comfortable living space than the Great Hall, which must have been cold and draughty in wintertime.

After you have completed your tour of the house, many children will enjoy exploring the extensive gardens at Ightham Mote. There are formal gardens close to the house with a lot of colour and a small orchard that is carpeted with daffodils in spring. And later in spring, the orchard is rich with the fragrance of apple blossom and in the autumn, the aroma of ripe apples. Further from the house are the pleasure grounds, including a lake and a natural play area under the trees.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ightham-mote

Gardens



Great Hall



The Historic Dockyard Chatham

an amazing maritime experience...

- Follow the Anchor signs from the M2 and M20 (junction 6), through Chatham (ME4 4TY)
- Public transport: Arriva service buses (Mon to Sat) stop on Dock Road (300 m from entrance); Explore Medway tour buses (Arriva) from Chatham and Rochester stop by entrance (school summer holidays)
- Open daily mid Feb to early Dec (check website for details); admission charge (one carer free), ticket valid for one year; large free car park
- Accessible toilets; cafés; manual wheelchairs bookable in advance
- Several play areas
- Terrain: ramp access to Visitor Entrance; the site is level or gently sloping across mainly paved and gravelled surfaces (cobblestones around Ropery); steel walkways and steep ladders (with narrow passageways) on warships; level access in most galleries (lift in Command of the Oceans galleries and gentle inclined walkway in RNLI; Access Statement on website)
- Quiet area: walled garden
- Submarine – guided tours
- Occasional vehicles on site
- Low lighting in some areas
- Mannequins
- River and two wet docks (low railings in places)
- Dogs should be on lead (assistance dogs only in galleries)
- Virtual tours on website.

The Historic Dockyard Chatham is an amazing place to visit, but for a child with autism it could be overwhelming without some preparation. There is so much to see that you will probably need several visits to experience everything in the Dockyard. Fortunately, the entrance ticket is valid for one year, so you might, for example, visit the three historic warships on your first visit. On another occasion you could visit the RNLI Lifeboat Collection, the Command of the Oceans galleries and/or the Ropewalk. If your child needs some time out, you could retire to the walled Commissioner's Garden, an oasis of calm with a large lawn, flower beds and benches where you can sit and perhaps talk about what you have seen.

Exploring the warships will give your child a real insight into life onboard HMS Gannet, a Victorian Sloop built on the River Medway in 1878; HMS Cavalier, a World War Two Destroyer; and HM Submarine Ocelot, built at Chatham and launched in 1962 to patrol the seas during the cold war. The submarine might be particularly exciting for your child, but access could be challenging for some children. It involves climbing down a short but steep ladder, with narrow confined areas and several hatchways to climb through. In the submarine command centre ask your child to look through the periscope! Access is with a tour guide only – book a time when you arrive: a walk-through tour lasts 15 minutes (for 30 people) or a descriptive tour

HMS Gannet (Tone Blakesley)



lasts 30 minutes (for 20 people). To know what to expect, check out the virtual tour on the website. You can freely explore the other two warships at any time; access to the main deck and commander's cabin of HMS Gannet is via a ramped gangway. Children can ring the ship's bell and hold the ship's wheel. You can also explore the lower deck, poop and forecastle decks via steep ladders. HMS Cavalier is accessed by a steeper gangway and steps. Once on board, you are free to walk through large areas of the ship, again using steep ladders and following narrow passageways. Many children will find this an exciting space to explore, discovering the operations room, radar room, crew quarters with hammocks, sitting on the Bridge and so on.

The Ropery is also a fascinating place to visit. Rope has been made at Chatham since 1618. The 45 minute factory tour may be too long for many children, but you can choose the 20 minute demonstration of how long strands of rope are laid and then twisted together to make rope (note there may be around 60 people in the tour group). The Ropewalk (see image below) is about 350 m long! You can walk the length of the Ropewalk as the rope is actually being laid (note the machine at the right hand end of the Ropewalk, as you enter the building, is very noisy, but you can follow the process walking away from this machine). Another highlight might be the Command of the Oceans galleries, that include the 'Hearts of Oak' exhibition – a series of audio-visual galleries presenting a historical reconstruction set in 1806 of the visit by a retired Master Shipwright and his grandson to the Dockyard to see how a wooden hulled ship is built (note this includes video, sound effects, flashing lights and changes in lighting).

<http://thedockyard.co.uk>

Ropewalk (Tone Blakesley)



Model of HMS Victory (Tone Blakesley)



- From the M20 junction 8, follow the A20 towards Maidstone, after 1.5 miles, take the minor road signposted to Otham and Stoneacre, turn left by the village green, the car park is on the right at the bottom of the hill (ME15 8RS)

- No suitable public transport

- Open Sat and Bank Holidays (mid Mar to Sep); admission charge (free for two carers and National Trust members); car park in a field 175 m from the house along a quiet, but steep lane (ford crossed by narrow footbridge); two blue badge disabled parking spaces directly opposite the house

- Visitor reception in main house; toilet and tearoom

- Terrain: main house accessible on level ground, stairs to first floor; garden partly accessible for wheelchairs, but much of the garden is on multiple levels with steep slopes and steps, along grass and stone paths; benches in gardens and courtyard; access statement on the website; typical walk around the formal gardens 250 m

- Quiet space: almost anywhere in the garden

- Several unfenced ponds in the garden

- Assistance dogs only in the house, dogs on lead in the garden

- Small playground on the village green.

Stoneacre

medieval yeoman's house and garden...

Stoneacre is a relatively small, 15th century timber-framed house, with lovely gardens, managed by the National Trust. What might appeal most to families with a child with autism is the peaceful, countryside setting and the tranquillity of the gardens. You cannot see the house from the car park, so it might be a small adventure for your child to find it – first you have to cross a ford, using a narrow footbridge. A footpath to the left would take you up a small valley, often with sheep grazing (a walk for later perhaps), but you should continue along the lane, up a short, but steep hill. When you arrive at the gates on your right, an impressive timber-framed house stands in front of you. Walk down the path to the reception, just inside the house.

Children may be surprised to learn that the original house, known as a 'Wealden hall house', was built more than 500 years ago, in the late 15th century. Early in the 20th century it was restored and extended. Explain to your child that this is an oak timber-framed house, with wattle and daub walls – a mixture of mud, animal hair and cow dung! Tenants live in the house now, so only three rooms are open to the public, the Great Hall, Parlour and on the first floor, the Solar. As a consequence, it may only take 20 minutes or so to walk around. However, the Great Hall is impressive, with its high ceiling and magnificent chimney. Your child may never have been in such a room!

Stoneacre front garden (Tone Blakesley)



But it wasn't always like this – when the hall was first lived in, ask your child to imagine an earth floor covered with straw, a fire in the centre of the room with no chimney, and cloth across the windows as it is unlikely that the original building had glass. The Parlour was also part of the original hall, with original 17th century furniture and stone floors. A wooden spiral staircase leads to the Solar, essentially a guest room, and part of the original house. This is also a beamed room, with 17th and 18th century furniture, including a four poster bed made of oak.

Downstairs is a lovely tearoom, with home made cakes provided by the Stoneacre tenants. You could sit in the tearoom, or outside in the courtyard if your child is happy to do so. Ask them to look at the weathervane above the courtyard, to see if they can guess which animals it represents. From here you can explore the gardens. The formal gardens around the house are clearly lovingly maintained, but the plants are allowed to spill over the narrow paths. Some children might enjoy brushing past the vegetation as they walk around. There are also fruit trees, lawns, and hidden corners to sit, and perhaps read a story. Despite being close to Maidstone and the motorway, you might hear only birdsong and the bleating of sheep. You might also find a basket of lawn skittles, or hoopla on one of the lawns, which your child might enjoy. For a slightly longer walk, follow a grassy path, damp in places, down the slope towards the ponds you passed as you walked along the lane. The vegetation is more natural here and definitely has a wild feel to it. Look out for dragonflies patrolling the water in the summer months!

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stoneacre

Stoneacre back garden (Tone Blakesley)



Great Hall (Tone Blakesley)



- From the A28 in Tenterden, follow the B2082 for 2 miles to Smallhythe village; car park on the left (TN30 7NG)

- Public transport: buses from Rye and Tenterden (Mon to Sat) stop by the church

- Open Wed to Sun (Mar to Oct); admission charge (free for two carers and National Trust members); small car park in a layby 50 m from the house; church car park allows direct access to the garden from the churchyard to avoid walking down the road (200 m to the house)

- Visitor reception in main house; toilets with assistance rails (not accessible to wheelchair users) and tearoom; garden picnic tables

- Terrain: wheelchair access through most of the garden (grassy paths with occasional stone inlay), minimal slopes; wheelchair access to ground floor of house, stairs to first floor; access statement on the website; typical garden walk 500 m

- Theatre lighting is dim; a narrow corridor leads backstage, past electrical wiring to the green and dressing rooms

- Quiet space: the garden

- Unfenced ponds in garden; unfenced dyke close to layby car park

- Assistance dogs only in the house; dogs on lead in the garden

- Garden map available in reception.

Smallhythe Place

interesting theatrical history...

Smallhythe Place is not only a very interesting place to visit for its heritage, it also has a lovely garden offering quiet spaces for children with autism, in a rural setting. On arrival, you will find parking bays marked out in a layby just 50 m from the entrance to Smallhythe Place. If you have concerns about the close proximity of the road to the car park (or it is full on busier days in summer), you may use the church car park. Travelling from Tenterden, this is on the left, immediately before the church in Smallhythe village. From here, you can walk through the churchyard to Smallhythe Place garden and walk down the gentle slope to the house itself. At the reception desk in the house, ask for a laminated map of the garden, and you then have the choice of walking around the house first, or exploring the garden.

Looking from the outside, the house is impressive, with its timbered frame and pastel orange walls. Explain to your child that the house is about 500 years old! They might be surprised to learn that when the house was constructed, Smallhythe was a thriving medieval shipbuilding port – today, the nearest coast is 8 miles away, at Rye Harbour. A poster in the garden includes a map of the coastline in the early 16th century. If your child is interested in acting or the arts, explain to them that Smallhythe Place was home to a famous Victorian actress, Ellen Terry. Ellen found happiness in the countryside, an escape from her busy acting career in London. The house is furnished

Smallhythe Place



as it would have been when Ellen Terry was alive – so there is much to talk about as you walk around, from Victorian fireplaces to a newspaper printed in 1900. You will see examples of costumes worn by Ellen Terry in her 'dressing room', daggers and swords used in theatrical productions, 'Victorian piggy banks', her school writing desk and many portraits on the walls.

Next to the house is the 17th century thatched Barn Theatre, which you can access via the tearoom. The barn was converted into a theatre by Ellen Terry's daughter, shortly after her mother's death. This should interest any children involved with the performing arts. It is still used to this day, and back stage your child might be fascinated to see the 'green room' where actors relax before going on stage; there is also a dressing room, with mirrors surrounded by light bulbs, make up on the table top ready to use, and a chaise longue. You could sit quietly in the theatre with your child, and perhaps imagine performers on the stage.

The garden is a tranquil place, with open fields beyond its boundaries. In spring you are likely to see sheep with lambs in these fields. The garden includes a small nuttury, where Kentish cobnuts and filberts (cultivated varieties of hazelnuts) are grown. In spring children might find the pink and white apple blossom delightful; earlier in spring, there are carpets of daffodils. For children who like strong scents, there is a rose garden by the house and a recently planted rose arbour by the summerhouse. Take care as you walk round, because there are two deep water ponds. In the late spring, you might find ducklings on one of these ponds.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/smallhythe-place

Fireplace



Garden well



The Union Mill Cranbrook

a rare opportunity to explore a working mill...

- From the High Street in the centre of Cranbrook, turn into The Hill, to find a free car park immediately on the right (no onsite parking at the mill); the mill is on the left after 130 m (TN17 3AH)
- Public transport: Cranbrook is on the Tenterden to Tunbridge Wells (Mon to Sat) and Maidstone to Sandhurst (daily) bus routes
- Open 2.30-5.00 pm Sat and Bank Holidays (Apr to Sep), Sun and Wed last week Jul to end Aug; admission free (donations welcome)
- Toilets on site; places to eat in nearby town centre
- Terrain: the road slopes gently from the car park up to the mill; the mill itself has six floors, accessed by steep, narrow stairs (visitors are advised to climb down facing the steps)
- Access to gantry - with a floor of wooden slats and a low railing - that runs around the base of the wooden smock (may be unsuitable for vertigo sufferers)
- Quiet space: the miller's workshop is often quiet
- No dogs are allowed due to Food Hygiene Regulations
- Audio-visual room in the basement with a video showing a guided tour of the mill
- Kent Windmills Education Pack can be downloaded from the website; virtual tour also on the website.

The Union Mill dominates the skyline in Cranbrook. It was built in 1814 and stands 22 m high, making it the tallest windmill – known as a ‘smock mill’ – in England. It is a fascinating place for children to visit and one of the few windmills in England that is in working order. If you visit on a windy day, you may well find the sweeps (apparently called ‘sails’ north of the River Thames) turning, and grain being ground inside the mill. Whether the mill is in use or not, exploring it should certainly be an adventure for your child, providing that you are able to climb the steep steps between the various floors. The volunteer guides stationed on each floor are passionate about the mill, extremely knowledgeable and very helpful; they will explain what you are looking at, demonstrate some of the machinery and point out exhibits that children may touch.

Climbing up to the Weighing Floor (first floor) you will find a working model of the cap (the top section of the mill to which the sweeps are attached, which rotates to face the wind). Continue to the Machinery Floor (second floor) to find an Oat Crusher, Flour Dresser (used to separate white flour from the coarser bran) and a Winnower. The guide will demonstrate for your child how the miller used the Winnower to separate ‘the wheat from the chaff’ (note this is noisy for a few seconds). There is also a small hand mill for children to grind their own flour to take home and bake with! The Meal Floor (third floor)

Winnower (Tone Blakesley)



houses an exhibition showing traditional ways of grinding flour – you are now at the base of the actual wooden smock, and there is a gantry that allows you to walk around the outside; this is guarded by railings that stand about 1 m high. It offers fantastic views across the rooftops of Cranbrook. The Stone Floor (fourth floor) is the location for two enormous millstones, balanced on top of one another. It is these stones that mill the grain for flour. From here, there is one final ascent up a narrow ladder to the Bin Floor, where you can look into the Cap. Only five people are allowed at a time, as the area set aside for visitors is rather cramped. Although you will have seen a working model of the cap earlier, it is well worth making this final ascent, to see the giant wooden wheels in the cap that are powered by the sweeps. This power is transferred to the millstones below by a series of cogs. Surprisingly, the cogs are made of apple wood, which is harder than oak and very oily, thus requiring no lubrication. Children who reach the top floor will be given a signed certificate, which they might be very proud to receive!

Back at ground level, be sure to visit the Miller's Workshop in the Russell Building, immediately behind the mill. Here you will find tools used by the miller, together with a scale model of the Union Mill, an electric powered set of millstones which may be demonstrated on open days (quite noisy) and a 'Wire Machine' used to separate 'meal' from the grinding stones into flour and bran. If your child understands present day concerns about energy consumption, it might be interesting to reflect with them that windmills such as the Union Mill generate all their energy through the utilisation of sustainable wind power.

www.unionmill.org.uk

Model of the cap



Union Mill (Tone Blakesley)



- From the High Street in the centre of Cranbrook, turn into Carriers Road, to find the museum on the left after 100 m (TN17 3JX)

- Public transport: Cranbrook is on the Tenterden to Tunbridge Wells (Mon to Sat) and Maidstone to Sandhurst (daily) bus routes

- Open 2.00 to 4.30 pm Tues to Sat (Apr to the end of Oct), summer bank holidays and every Sun during July and Aug, admission free (donations welcomed); Jockey Lane car park (free) is opposite the museum, 100 m from the museum entrance

- Toilet and disabled toilet next to the visitor reception area; places to eat in nearby town centre

- Terrain: museum on three floors (no lift access); brick paths and lawns surround the house; typical walk around the garden 100 m

- Lighting in some rooms is activated upon entering

- Mannequins in costume display room

- Bird taxidermy collection; some rooms display tools or other objects with sharp edges

- Quiet space: almost anywhere in the garden

- Dogs should be on a lead in the garden and the museum

- 'One minute' video on website; quiz sheets available for children.

Cranbrook Museum

a fascinating local museum...

This is a fascinating place for a child with autism to learn about the history of a small Kentish Wealden town and much more besides. The museum is housed in a timber-framed building dating from the late 15th century, set in small, but delightful cottage gardens that offer a peaceful retreat for children with autism. Volunteers in the visitor reception area are friendly and helpful and will be pleased to give your family an introduction to the history of the museum and guide you to the various exhibitions and displays. There are thirteen rooms over three floors, each offering an insight into the past lives of people who lived and worked in Cranbrook and the surrounding countryside.

With so many rooms, there will surely be many things around the museum that children will find interesting. However, carers should be aware that some children with autism might find the rooms a little overwhelming, given that so many objects are displayed on the walls, in cabinets and free standing. On the ground floor for example, the first room you are likely to walk through includes a small number of Roman artefacts, an exhibition describing the history of Cranbrook's famous broadcloth industry through the Middle Ages and Tudor times, and a printer's composing frame. The centre piece of the adjacent room is one of the first film projectors used in Cranbrook's 'Picture Palace' (see image opposite), a cinema built in the early twenties, which has long since closed. From here you will find a room packed

Cranbrook Museum



with handmade agricultural tools designed for a wide range of activities, from coppicing trees to haymaking. Adults should note that there are many sharp edges on the tools, which are within reach of even the youngest children.

On the first floor, displays include a small collection of Victorian costumes featuring a page boy's uniform from the Royal Court amongst others. Another room is dedicated to the 'Cranbrook Colony of Artists'. Amongst the artwork, lookout for an oil painting entitled 'The Chimney Sweep', painted in 1862 in the room in which it hangs. If your child is interested in natural history and is happy to look at taxidermy specimens, Room 7 on the first floor houses the Boyd Alexander collection of Kent and Sussex birds. There are some 300 different species, mostly in good condition. In addition to more familiar species such as garden birds, there are species that are harder to see in the wild, such as owls, and species that have now disappeared from the area, including the magnificent sea eagle. Your child may be amazed at the size of this bird! There are several more rooms on the second floor, including one designated for items from the retail trade featuring a vintage typewriter and cash tills, and a display of bottles.

If at any time you need a quiet space, or when you have finished walking around the museum, the cottage garden is a pleasant place to explore. It is mainly lawns and flower borders with flowers such as foxglove and honeysuckle in the summer, but there is also a vegetable garden with plants such as potatoes, peas and strawberries. There are several garden benches, a 'lock-up' that was used in the past for townspeople who had too much to drink, and a sundial to investigate.

www.cranbrookmuseum.org

First floor galleries (Tone Blakesley)



'Picture Palace' film projector



- On the A257, opposite Longport car park, close to Canterbury city centre (CT1 1PF)

- Public transport: Canterbury bus station 500 m; buses for Sandwich, Ramsgate and Westwood (daily) stop about 100 m from the abbey; Canterbury East and West railway stations approximately 1km and 1.5 km walk respectively

- Open daily Apr to Oct, weekends Nov to Mar (check website for details); admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members)

- Visitor reception in museum, small gift shop in side room (with hot and cold drinks); accessible toilets

- Terrain: uneven gravel and grassland paths (can be slippery in wet weather), hidden stonework, steps (can be avoided) and some sheer drops (not signposted); manual wheelchair users advised by English Heritage to bring an assistant; detailed access information on website; typical walk 750 m

- No climbing allowed on the low ruined walls

- Habits for adults and children to wear around the site

- Mannequins and human skeleton in the museum

- Quiet space: large open site, many places to walk or sit quietly

- Dogs should be on lead

- Photographs and history of the abbey on the website.

St Augustine's Abbey

explore a peaceful ruined abbey...

The ruins of the Abbey of St Augustine are one of the important monuments have helped Canterbury to gain recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Others include Canterbury Cathedral and nearby St Martin's Church. Together with a number of museums, these heritage properties attract large numbers of tourists to Canterbury. However, St Augustine's Abbey is outside the city wall, and represents one of the quieter locations in Canterbury; many families with a child with autism will appreciate the extensive grounds and quiet places to sit. Before walking around the ruins you can explore the brightly lit and spacious museum. By the entrance you will see Benedictine monk's black habits (with hoods) for adults and children that you can try on over your clothes. Close by is a wheel you can spin to choose a monk's name (people entering the monastery would have been given a new name). Visitors are able to wear a habit as they explore the museum and ruins if they wish! An annotated map of the site is actually sewn into the children's habits. Your child should therefore be prepared to encounter 'monks' as they walk around.

The museum is very clearly laid out and charts the history of the site from Anglo-Saxon to Tudor times. Explain to your child that the abbey was one of the most important monasteries in England, being a centre of learning and spirituality. You will discover that the abbey was founded in 598, soon after St Augustine arrived in England from Rome. Augustine was welcomed by King Æthelberht of Kent and given land to

Abbey ruins

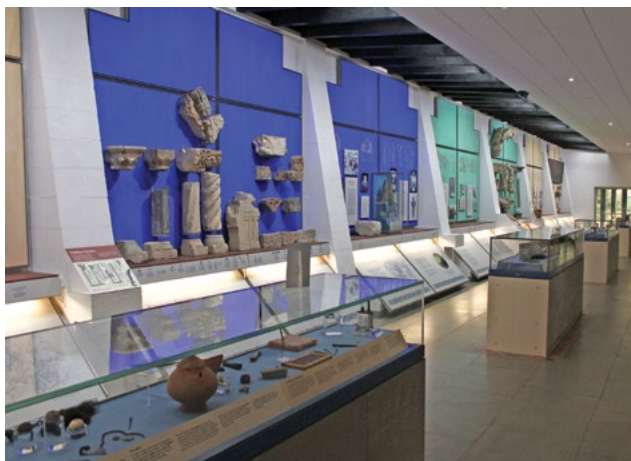


build a church on the present site. After the Normans invaded in 1066, the Anglo-Saxon abbot was replaced by a Norman monk. The abbey was then rebuilt on a massive scale, with the construction of a magnificent new church that was over 100 m in length. A short video timeline (with soft music) shows how the buildings would have changed with time. Children over 13 years old can also use headsets for a virtual reality tour of the monastery; this will take them 'inside' the Norman church. Younger children can watch on a screen whilst an older child or adult is using the headset. The museum displays masonry, stone carvings and artefacts from the various Anglo-Saxon and Norman buildings. The museum also exhibits reproduction costumes worn by King Æthelberht and Queen Bertha (see image below). Parents should be aware that the skeleton of a woman buried in the 15th century is also on display.

Outside your child can explore the ruins of the great Norman church, and what remains of Augustine's original Anglo-Saxon church, which was almost completely destroyed by the Normans. Standing in the nave of the Norman church, with the partial remains of the inner wall to one side, you will begin to get an impression of the size of the original building. At the far end of the nave is the ruined crypt of Wulfric's Rotunda, part of the original Anglo-Saxon church. Beyond this, steps allow you to explore the crypt of the Norman church and the pillars that would have supported the high altar. Children might enjoy feeling the texture of the flint walls but should not climb on them. Sadly, like the Anglo-Saxon monastery before it, the Norman church fell into ruin following its closure by Henry VIII in what has become known as the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/st-augustines-abbey/

Museum



Anglo-Saxon robes



- From the M20 Junction 10, follow the A2070 north for 0.15 miles, and then turn right into the minor road, following signs to Brook (TN25 5PF)
- No suitable public transport
- Open 2.00 to 5.00 pm Sat and Sun (usually June to Sep), but check website for details; small admission charge for adults (concession for carers); small car park and roadside parking
- Toilet designated for disabled
- Terrain: level access to the majority of the museum; oast house has two floors, first floor accessed by a steep ladder; the floor of the barn and the lawn between the two buildings are uneven; typical walk around the museum and lawns 250 m
- Lighting in some parts of the museum is dim
- Tools and farm equipment on display throughout the museum with rusted and sharp edges within easy reach of children
- Quiet space: the lawn area, although the museum is usually quiet
- A small stream (unfenced) runs along the edge of the site
- Dogs may be encountered off lead
- Audio tour and an inexpensive guide pamphlet available.

Agricultural Museum Brook

an opportunity to explore an oast house...

The Agricultural Museum is a quiet place, in a rural location, that is ideal for an afternoon visit for many children with autism. The staff are friendly, helpful and knowledgeable and would be pleased to show you around. Exploring the buildings, you will learn about farming practices in Kent before the widespread introduction of tractors, when wagons and agricultural implements such as ploughs were drawn by horses and oxen. The buildings housing the collections are themselves of historic importance and impressive. Your child may have seen many oast houses whilst travelling around Kent, but here is an opportunity to go inside one which retains its original features. You can walk into the circular kiln that was used for drying and curing hops. If you are able, climb the steep ladder to the first floor to show your child the slatted floor where the hops were dried. There is also a wide range of tools associated with hops on display in the oast, and other tools, including shepherd's crook heads from around the country.

The main collection of larger agricultural equipment is housed in Grange Barn, a 14th century medieval barn. Explain to your child that the barn would have originally been used for storing and processing the grain harvest. Upon entering, your eyes may be immediately drawn to one of several large horse-drawn wagons. A brightly coloured blue and red wagon was known as a 'Plain Jane', apparently because of its appearance. The exhibits are displayed in a series of bays, arranged according to their purpose, such as ploughing and harvesting. What is perhaps most striking about the collection is the hard manual labour that must have been involved in farming before mechanisation. Next to the museum is Brook Church, constructed by the Normans around 1075. If you look inside, you will find a series of faded wall paintings dating back to the 13th century.

www.agriculturalmuseumbrook.org.uk

Sussex Wagon



Oast house (Tone Blakesley)



- Tenterden Town station signposted off High Street (A28) (TN30 6HE); other stations include Northiam and Bodiam
- Public transport: buses from Headcorn and Maidstone (daily), Ashford and Tunbridge Wells (Mon to Sat) stop on Tenterden High Street (300 m from the station)
- Seasonal opening (Apr to Oct) with special timetables at other times (check website); admission charge (platform or train ticket) (one carer free); large free car park at Tenterden, smaller car park at Northiam, no car park at Bodiam
- Colonel Stephens Museum
- Event days: check website as these can be very busy
- Toilet, accessible toilet and café at Tenterden Station; accessible toilet and tearoom (seasonal opening) at Northiam Station; accessible toilet at Bodiam
- Terrain: mostly firm and level surfaces around the stations (short walk up a gradual incline from the car park to Tenterden station along an uneven path); accessibility statement on website
- Railway coach with wheelchair access and accessible toilet (accommodation can be reserved in advance)
- Quiet space: countryside public footpaths nearby
- Dogs on lead welcome (assistance dogs only in museum, café and buffet carriages)
- Informative website.

Kent & East Sussex Railway

steaming through the countryside!

The Kent & East Sussex Railway is a great place to visit if your child has an interest in trains. However, parents should be aware that it can be busy at times, particularly on event days. The highlight of your visit will probably be a ride on a steam train or heritage diesel. Trains depart from Tenterden Station, calling at several small stations during the 50 minute journey through the Kent countryside to Bodiam in East Sussex. You might wish to visit Bodiam Castle (800 m walk to the castle entrance, discounted admission on presentation of your train ticket) and return on a later train. If the train is pulled by a steam locomotive, children can disembark at Bodiam and watch as the locomotive is moved from one end of the train to the other. They may be fascinated to see an engineer on the track coupling the locomotive to the carriages. Your child might also enjoy the opportunity to get very close to a large steam train! However, if you watch the train depart, the locomotive might give several loud 'chuffs' and a hiss of steam as the driver opens the regulator; the driver might also sound the whistle, and the safety valves can lift with quite a loud roaring sound – some children may find the sudden noises alarming.

Back at Tenterden, there is a small model railway, play area and the Colonel Stephens Museum (free admission). This houses a fascinating collection of railway artefacts, memorabilia and models from 16 railways associated with the Colonel, such as station signs, posters, photographs, railway lamps and model trains. There is a representation of the Colonel's 1920 office and a steam train – the 'Gazelle' was the smallest standard gauge locomotive built in Britain! Close by, children can climb into an old railway carriage. And finally, there are second hand railway books for young railway enthusiasts!

www.kesr.org.uk

Heritage diesel



- New Romney station is off the main A259 (TN28 8PL); for Dungeness station, follow signs from Lydd (TN29 9NA); other stations at Hythe, Dymchurch, St Mary's Bay and Romney Sands

- Public transport: Rye to Dover bus (daily) and Lydd to Ashford (Mon to Sat) stop outside New Romney railway station

- Open daily (Apr to Oct); check website for timetables at other times; admission charge (approx. 10% concession for disabled and one carer); large free car parks at New Romney, Dungeness and Hythe

- Event days: check website as these can be busy

- Toilet, accessible toilet and café at New Romney, Dungeness and Hythe

- Two play areas and Model Exhibition at New Romney

- Terrain: mostly firm and level surfaces around the stations (short walk up gradual incline from car park to New Romney ticket office); accessibility statement on website

- Coaches adapted for wheelchairs (available by prior arrangement or first come first served basis); stair lift to Model Exhibition

- Quiet space: walk up towards the engine sheds at New Romney, or across the shingle at Dungeness

- Dogs may be encountered off lead

- Informative website with a lot of photographs of steam trains.

Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway

New Romney to Dungeness by train...

This is a fantastic heritage railway to visit that many children with autism will enjoy, especially those who love trains! The Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway (RH&DR) has 13.5 miles of track from Hythe to Dungeness. For children with detailed knowledge of railways, the RH&DR operates on a 15 inch gauge track that was officially opened in 1927 between Hythe and New Romney. It was extended to Dungeness the following year. The first trains to run on the line were two one-third full size Pacific steam locomotives, Green Goddess and Northern Chief, both of which are still in use today. The line was requisitioned during the war but was reopened soon afterwards with Laurel and Hardy famously 'cutting the ribbon'; your child might be interested to watch a British Movietone news clip about this on YouTube. Now the railway has 11 steam engines and two diesel locomotives.

New Romney is the headquarters of the railway and an ideal 'mid-line' stopping point for families travelling from Hythe to Dungeness. Travel times from Hythe to Dungeness vary from just over an hour (one way) in the summer months to 1.5 hours at other times. In the summer, trains wait at Dungeness for 10 minutes or so before returning to Hythe, but at other times you may have to wait for 30 minutes or more (check published timetables). New Romney is also an ideal starting point for families who prefer a shorter trip; the journey from New Romney to Dungeness takes about half an hour each way. New Romney

'Typhoon' (Tone Blakesley)



has the added attraction of a Model Railway Exhibition; if you don't want to go on the train, families can purchase a platform and Model Exhibition ticket. The centrepiece of the exhibition is a model railway which the RH&DR believes is 'possibly' the largest, and certainly the busiest model railway in England. Children may be captivated by the variety and number of model trains; look out for the TGV, Pendolino, Eurostar and various steam engines as they run around the track. One train can be operated directly by the push of a button, as can a turntable and a rack rail locomotive that climbs a short slope. There are also two smaller, interactive layouts, where at the push of a button, children can operate Thomas and friends, or one of several larger O gauge engines. The exhibition also features many display cases containing engines of various gauges and offers second hand railway books and magazines for sale.

The station itself is often quiet, until one or two trains arrive, when it becomes a hive of activity until the trains depart. Many families take the opportunity to walk up to the locomotives to take pictures. If you board the train to Dungeness, you will enjoy views across Romney Marsh and after Romney Sands the characteristic shingle landscape of the Dungeness Peninsula. When you arrive at Dungeness, your child could spend more time with the train before you leave, or you could choose to take a later train and go for a walk in Dungeness National Nature Reserve. Some children might like to visit the Old Lighthouse, which is directly opposite the station. If the lighthouse is open, you might decide to climb to the top if your child is able – the lighthouse is 46 m high – where the views across the Peninsula are stunning.

www.rhdr.org.uk

<https://dungenesslighthouse.com>

Model railway



Old Lighthouse and Dungeness Station



Elham Valley Railway Museum

a quiet and fascinating museum...

- From junction 12 of the M20, head west for 0.7 miles, turn right following signs to Newington and the Railway Museum, to find the car park on the right after 0.3 miles (CT18 8AZ)
- Public transport: Folkestone to Canterbury bus (daily) stops on the A20 at the Newington turn, with a 500 m walk to museum along minor road mostly without pavements
- Open weekends and bank holidays (Apr to Nov), small admission charge; large free car park next to the Countryside Centre
- Toilet, accessible toilet and tearoom in the Countryside Centre
- Small playhouse
- Terrain: the Countryside Centre is next to the car park; the Railway Museum is on the other side of the former railway embankment following sloping gravel paths (150 m); to avoid the embankment walk along the road for 100 m
- Mannaquins in the museum
- Several video loops with commentary; sound effects in signal box and audio in old station building
- Fenced fish pond; wooden bridge over a narrow stream
- Quiet space: in a countryside location and often quiet
- Dogs should be on a lead
- Interactive displays to interest children including model railways and signal box.

This is a small, but delightful Railway Museum run by the Elham Valley Line Trust. It is often quiet, with friendly staff who make families feel very welcome. It is an ideal place to visit for families with a child with autism. The car park is next to the George's Barn – a 290 year old Kentish oak beam barn housing the Countryside Centre – but your child may be keen to go first to the Railway Museum, just over an embankment that was formerly part of the Elham Valley Railway. A short cut to the top of the old railway embankment takes you through 'Charlie Chaplin', a renovated Folkestone Funicular Lift Carriage. You will now be crossing the track bed of the Elham Valley Railway that once connected the towns of Canterbury and Folkestone, following the Elham Valley through what is now the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The line was in operation from 1884 until its closure in 1947.

What is particularly special about this museum is the number of interactive exhibits. Your child can climb a few steps into the cab of a static tank engine, then stand on the footplate and pretend to drive the steam train! Next to the steam engine is Peene Signal Box. At many railways, you might only be able to look through the window of a signal box, but here you can go in and pull the big levers! As you pull back one lever, a bell rings and outside you will see a signal move up and down! There is also an old telephone that you can use to call the telephone on the nearby platform. The platform itself looks as an

Tank engine (Tone Blakesley)



Elham Valley Railway platform would have looked in the 1940s, with milk churns, a porter's trolley stacked with vintage leather suitcases and weighing scales that you can stand on. The station building itself has a model railway representing the Elham Valley Line – you can see the train running for 20p. The building also has an old ticket office, and a lot of artefacts from the railway, such as railwayman's signal lamps and uniforms. Another building is devoted to the channel tunnel and with a fantastic model railway layout that depicts the channel tunnel terminal. Although it is only a model, your child will be able to appreciate the vast scale of the terminal. And before you leave, why not have a ride on a 7 ¼" gauge miniature railway; a short ride behind a diesel locomotive that takes you several times around the fish pond.

Returning to George's Barn, you might try the crazy golf course set out on the lawn (donation suggested), or other games such as hoopla and a wooden train track. The Countryside Centre itself accommodates displays of local crafts for sale, including wooden carvings and wool products from Jacob sheep, often there will be craftspeople at work. There are also displays about carpentry, sewing and printing. Up a short flight of stairs, past an exhibition of TV cameras from a BBC News Studio, a display case is full of household items from the past that might interest your child. Note there are bows and sharp-tipped arrows on display here which children can touch. If, on exiting the car park you turn right and continue along the minor road for just over 1 mile you will come to a layby with a great view across the actual Channel Tunnel complex, where you can watch the trains coming and going,

www.elhamvalleylinetrust.org

Peene signal box



Channel Tunnel model railway



Folkestone Museum

Look out for the fossils!

- The museum is in the centre of Folkestone on Guildhall Street, opposite Sandgate Road (CT20 1DY); nearby car parks include the NCP Car Park Bouverie Place (CT20 1AU) and the smaller Upper Payers (CT20 1EZ), approximately 350 m and 220 m respectively from the museum through the town centre
- Public transport: Folkestone Bus Station is next to the NCP Car Park Bouverie Place; the railway station is 1 km from the museum along busy roads
- Open Mon to Sat, though subject to seasonal changes (check website for details), admission free
- Visitor reception, accessible toilets on lower ground floor; wheelchair access to majority of the ground floor and lift to lower ground floor; floor plan shows location of ramps, stairs and lift; details of recommended drop off points near to the museum on the website
- Quiet space: although located in the busy town centre, the museum itself is generally quiet; there is a children's reading area with a good selection of books on the lower ground floor; the Lower Leas Coastal Park is close by
- Assistance dogs only
- 'Children's Explorer Guide' booklet available from the visitor reception.

Folkestone Museum is small and friendly, and an ideal place for a child to learn about the town's history. The galleries are spacious, well lit and often quiet. The museum also takes children back to the age of the dinosaurs! Various themed areas include 'fashionable Folkestone', maritime, natural and ancient history. For children interested in fossils, the Lower Ground Floor is a good place to start. Here you will find fossils collected locally from the Lower Greensand, Gault Clay and Chalk, formed between 80 and 120 million years ago. An impressive display case includes the bone of an armoured Ankylosaur dinosaur and a range of ammonites and other fossils. Children can also touch a recently discovered theropod dinosaur footprint! An 'interactive dig' allows children to search for objects that might be found in different levels of rock and soil. Moving forward in time, a poster introduces settlements from the Stone Age to the first Anglo-Saxon settlements. Displays include Iron Age pottery, Roman pottery and building materials, Bronze Age axe heads and an Anglo-Saxon burial, complete with the partially excavated skeleton of a woman, found on nearby Dover Hill. The gallery also reflects the Victorian passion for collecting natural history specimens, with drawers that children can open, containing moths, butterflies, birds' eggs and tropical marine shells.

Returning to the ground floor, you can explore the history of Folkestone through various posters and exhibits, from its origins as a small coastal community to a fashionable seaside town. There are several interactive exhibits that might interest your child, including: a small model boat, upon which they can place cargo containers to learn about the Plimsoll Line; two Morse code tappers and headphones to send messages; and a dressing up area to show how Victorians dressed to 'promenade' along the Folkestone seafront.

<https://folkestonemuseum.co.uk/>

Fossil display



- From the A299 Thanet Way, east of Herne Bay, follow the signs to Reculver; two car parks on the left at the end of the road (CT6 6SS)

- No suitable public transport

- Open daily and free admission; two pay-and-display car parks

- Disabled toilet and café by the car parks

- Large playground by the car parks

- Terrain: hard surface path to the towers (200 m), around the remains of the external walls of the Roman fort and along the sea wall east towards Minnis Bay; uneven grassland around the towers and west from the car parks towards Herne Bay; slope from car park to the towers; shingle and sandy beaches

- Cyclists use the sea wall path

- Steep bank and sea defences in the vicinity of the towers, behind wire fence; unstable cliff edge (unfenced) west of car park

- Quiet space: large open site, many places to walk or sit quietly

- Dogs may be encountered off lead.

Reculver Towers

Roman history by the sea...

Set in Reculver Country Park, Reculver Towers dominate the skyline along this stretch of coast, and you may see them long before you arrive at the car park. Although they stand within the footprint of a Roman fort, they were actually built in the 12th century, an addition to an Anglo-Saxon monastery that was founded on the site of the abandoned Roman fort in 669 AD. The towers have survived the ravages of time but only the ruins of the church remain, dominated by the remains of the 13th century chancel. You can walk around the ruins but the towers are closed. Explain to your child that the monastery was built in the centre of the Roman fort! Sadly little remains of the fort, but you can walk around the southern and eastern outer walls, which are constructed with flint. An information board shows what the fort may have looked like after its construction in 250 AD, illustrating a grid of streets and houses. At least half of the fort has been lost to the sea, which at the time would have been about 1 km to the north. Immediately to the east of the fort would have been the Wantsum Channel, which separated Kent from the Isle of Thanet.

After you have visited the ruins, your child might like to explore more of the country park. You can walk east towards Minnis Bay along the Saxon Shore Way or the shingle beach. If you visit in the winter you might encounter large flocks of brent geese moving from the sea to graze on nearby Reculver Marshes. West of the towers, you can walk along the cliff top, or along the sandy beach beneath, looking out for the incoming tide. In summer your child might be delighted to see sand martins hawking insects over the beach before returning to their nests, tunnelled into the sandy cliffs. And finally, there is a large play area by the car park, although this can be busy at weekends.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/reculver-towers-and-roman-fort/

Reculver Towers (Tone Blakesley)



- From the A256/A257 roundabout, take the minor road to Sandwich, turning left into Richborough Road, the car park is on the right after 1 mile (CT13 9JW)

- Public transport: Canterbury to Westwood bus stops by Richborough Road, with a 2 km walk to the Fort following the Saxon Shore Way, and crossing the railway line (OS map recommended)
- Open daily Apr to Oct, weekends Nov to Mar (check website for details); admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members)
- Visitor Centre with a small gift shop, drinks machine; small museum in adjacent room; accessible toilets April to Sep; at other times, public toilets in Guildhall Car Park, Sandwich (1.5 miles)
- Terrain: uneven grassland, occasional rabbit holes, steps and unfenced steep-sided ditches (can be slippery in wet weather); manual wheelchair users advised by English Heritage to bring an assistant; detailed access information on website; typical walk 1 km
- Avoid railway bank along eastern boundary of site
- Small handling collection in the museum for children
- Quiet space: large open site, many places to walk or sit quietly
- Dogs should be on lead
- Reading box full of books for children on Roman life.

Richborough Roman Fort

walk in the footsteps of the Romans...

The site of Richborough Roman Fort is a peaceful, open space in the East Kent countryside that many children with autism may enjoy visiting. If your child has any interest in the Romans, then a visit to Richborough Roman Fort should be very special. From the car park, it is a short walk to the Visitor Centre, where you have the choice of investigating the small museum or exploring the Roman Fort itself. Richborough was once one of the most important Roman settlements in Britain. It was founded almost 2,000 years ago in AD 43, around the time when the Romans, under Emperor Claudius, invaded Britain. Most people now believe that Richborough marks the site of the Claudian invasion in AD 43.

When the Romans first occupied the site at Richborough, it was on the Kent coast, looking out across the Wantsum Channel to the then 'Isle of Thanet'. It was occupied by the Romans for more than 350 years, and as you walk from the Visitor Centre, passing two defensive ditches, you will immediately see massive stone walls that surround much of the site. These were constructed in the late third-century when the site was used as a coastal fort to protect against raiders from overseas. Your child might be impressed by walls that were 3 m wide, and still stand up to 8 m high; they may want to touch the smooth surface of the flints that are held together by rough concrete. They might even imagine Roman soldiers patrolling along the top of the walls, looking out for invaders approaching from the sea. The facing stones

Roman Fort (Tone Blakesley)



have long since gone, probably to build houses in nearby towns, although some remain in the north east corner of the fort. As you walk across the centre of the fort, you are actually walking back in time, because the fort was originally a Roman town and port known as Rutupiae. Most of the early buildings in the settlement were made of timber and later replaced. However, the foundations of buildings made of stone that replaced them do survive, and you can explore these with your child, including the ruins of the mansio (an official inn), bath house and shop buildings. Note that there are ditches in the central area of the fort with fairly steep sides. These were constructed as fortifications at different times in the site's history. In late spring and early summer, the ditches are full of wild flowers which attract marbled white and common blue butterflies, and many other insects. Elsewhere, the grassland is regularly mown for easy walking.

The museum offers a fascinating insight into Roman life and your child might be impressed with the replica suit of Roman armour as they enter the museum. Many of the artefacts on display were recovered during archaeological excavations. Some of these are items associated with everyday life, such as gaming boards and dice, glass bottles and beads. A display case shows a selection of pots and implements used in cooking and serving food, including oil burning lamps, a cooking pot and iron knives. Some pieces of pottery, building materials and bone can be touched, although they are secured to tables. Or your child might want to look through the many children's books about the Romans, and perhaps listen to a story.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richborough-roman-fort-and-amphitheatre/

Roman Fort



Roman armour (Tone Blakesley)



- By the Deal seafront on Marine Road, off the A258 (CT14 7BA); large pay-and-display car park 60 m from the castle

- Public transport: Deal railway station is 700 m from the castle; buses to Deal from Canterbury, Dover, Sandwich and Tilmanstone (Mon to Sat)

- Open daily Apr to Oct; seasonal opening at other times (closed Christmas and New Year), check website for details; admission charge (English Heritage members and as many carers as required free); pay-and-display car park (refunded upon entry to castle) and disabled parking available

- Accessible toilets

- Terrain: castle on three floors, steep stairs with handrails, uneven surfaces in places that can become slippery; passage around the castle at moat level (the Rounds) dimly lit and narrow in places, wellies provided in case of standing water on the floor; wheelchair access limited; entrance on a busy road

- Bastions have low wall with steep drop to dry moat

- Quiet space: on the castle roof, or walk to nearby shingle beach

- Low lighting in some areas

- Assistance dogs only

- Resources for teachers on the website provide a lot of history and include a map of the castle.

Deal Castle

explore a Tudor castle by the sea...

Deal Castle is small for a castle, with many features that children interested in castles will want to explore. It was built in 1539 by Henry VIII to serve as an artillery fort and residence for the Captain of Deal, to defend an offshore navel anchorage called 'The Downs'. Explain to your child that the walls are not high, to reduce the vulnerability of the castle to gunfire. At that time, Britain feared an invasion from France and Spain, and the castle was one of three local artillery forts equipped with guns that defended Kent's channel coast for over 250 years. It was also under siege in 1648 during the English Civil War.

The castle is on three levels; the entrance leads through the gatehouse to bastions where cannons point out to sea. You can enjoy views to France on a clear day. From here it might be exciting for some children to go down the steep steps into the basement. Here you will find large, now empty store rooms and 'the Rounds' – a defensive passage inside the castle walls, narrow in places, that contains windows that soldiers would have defended with muskets. The passage moves between light and shade, with an echo in places, offering a sensory experience. Wellies are provided in case there is standing water on the floor. Some children may worry about getting lost in what to them might seem to be a maze of rooms and passageways. Returning to the ground and first floors, you can explore the communal areas and the living quarters of the Captain of the castle. Children might be particularly interested in a giant illustrated map showing Europe in 1539; another attraction is a large 3D jigsaw model of the castle for children to assemble. Over the centuries, people have left marks or graffiti on the soft lead covering the castle roof. In the Captain's quarters, children are invited to 'leave their mark' using chalk on coloured paper which can be attached to a black board.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/deal-castle/

Deal Castle



- Along the seafront on Victoria Parade, between the pier and Deal Castle (CT14 7BP); 1 hour parking on the sea front; small pay-and-display at South Street Car Park (CT14 7AW) 80 m walk to museum; larger pay-and-display at Middle Street Car Park (CT14 6ER) 250 m walk to museum
- Public transport: Deal railway station is 550 m from the museum; buses to Deal from Canterbury, Dover, Sandwich and Tilmanstone (Mon to Sat)
- Open weekends in spring, Wed to Sun in summer until the end of September (check website for details); small admission charge (concession for carer)
- No facilities, nearest toilets in South Street Car Park; accessible toilets for customers in Sainsbury's Superstore on West Street (CT14 6AH)
- Terrain: museum is on four floors (stairs but no ramp or lift access)
- Quiet space: cross the road to the shingle beach, close to the fishing boats
- Assistance dogs only
- Twenty minute video on the history of the museum is very informative – this is in a side room (quite loud at times).

Deal Timeball Tower

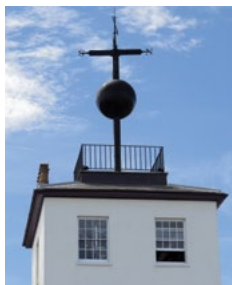
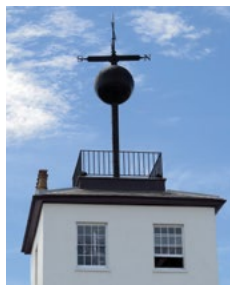
a chance to see a working Time Ball!

Many children with autism might be fascinated by the Timeball Tower. The 'Time Ball' itself sits on top of the tower and five minutes before the hour, it slowly rises, then on the hour precisely, the ball descends (see the series of images below). You can watch this from the beach opposite the tower, but only when the museum is open. If you are on the top floor of the tower at this time, your child will experience the rumbling and vibration of the ball as it rises and falls, but from inside the tower you cannot see the ball itself. Explain to your child that when the tower was first used for this purpose in 1855, a signal was sent by electric telegraph wires from the Greenwich Observatory in London at 1 pm. During its official working life, which ended in 1927, the time ball dropped at this time every day. This allowed ships in the Channel to check the accuracy of their chronometers, which were essential for navigation.

When you enter, be sure to ask your child to 'clock in' and 'clock out', by pushing a card given to them at reception into a vintage old clocking in clock. When the tower was constructed in 1820-21, it was used as a signalling tower, to send information to ships and other towers, for example in the fight against smuggling. On the first floor, an interactive model of the tower allows your child to tap out a message on a keyboard; the arms of the semaphore move to represent the letters. There is also a similar interactive model of a 'shutter telegraph'. The second floor contains model ships, including 'Deal Gallies', HMS Victory and HMS Sovereign of the Seas. There is also a telegraph key for tapping out Morse code – perhaps your child might like to tap out their name! Continue up the stairs to see the time ball mechanism on the top floor, and also for great views across the rooftops of Deal.

www.dealtimeball.co.uk

Timeball descending (Tone Blakesley)



Deal Maritime & Local History Museum

a wealth of maritime history!

- On St Georges Road, off High Street (CT14 6BA); limited 1 hour parking on St Georges Road; pay-and-display Town Hall Car Park (10 spaces) on St Georges Road, 80 m from the museum; St Georges Car Park pay-and-display on West Street (CT14 6EB), 150 m walk to the museum
- Public transport: Deal railway station is 350 m from the museum; buses to Deal from Canterbury, Dover, Sandwich and Tilmanstone (Mon to Sat)
- Open 11.00 to 4.30 pm Tues to Sat and 12.00 to 4.00 pm Sun (June to Aug); 2.00 to 4.30 pm Tues to Sat and 12.00 to 4.00 pm Sun (Apr, May, Sep and Oct); small admission charge (carer free)
- Toilet (not wheelchair accessible); accessible toilets for customers in Sainsbury's Superstore on West Street (CT14 6AH)
- Terrain: museum on two floors and in a stable block (stairs but no lift access); ground floor is wheelchair accessible
- Tablet computer allows visitors with limited mobility to access quizzes and view displays in the upper gallery
- Quiet space: visitors can sit in the small boatyard at the back of the museum
- Dogs allowed in the museum
- 'Pirate' quiz sheets for children and interactive quizzes on a computer and iPad.

If your child has an interest in the sea, especially boats, then they may be excited to explore this museum! The museum is small and often quiet, which should suit many children with autism. The entrance takes you straight into the Maritime Gallery which is dominated by two boats, 'The Saxon King' and 'Tender Too'. Saxon King is an impressive 28 foot (8.5 m) six-oared galley built in 1891 and said to be the fastest type of craft on the South East coast! It was last used as a rescue boat during the first world war, saving lives after a boat was torpedoed and sunk 1 mile off the Deal coast. Tender Too also has a special place in history as a lifeboat on the Thames Estuary ferry 'Southend Britannia'. During the second world war, the Britannia was sent to Dunkirk but it could not get close inshore due to the shallow water; Tender Too was launched to pick up troops from the beaches and ferry them back to the Britannia. Tender Too was later found and rescued from a muddy berth on the River Thames in London. There are also some large models of cutters and sailing ships in the gallery, a large ship's wheel and a wealth of other nautical exhibits (ask your child to look for the enormous whale vertebrae under a bench).

Upstairs you will find displays of old shop signs and a giant shoe, used to show what the shoe shop sold before many people could read and write! You will also find an exhibition of local history, including old bottles and a cabinet of curiosities typical of the 18th century. These cabinets are thought to have started the idea of modern museums.

Boatyard



Many children might have their own 'cabinet of curiosities' at home or be inspired to start one! Beyond the gallery is a small boatyard, with several more Deal boats, and seats to rest and perhaps talk about some of the exhibits you have seen.

The Stable Block is a small exhibition space that celebrates the long history of the Royal Marines in Deal, with a series of posters and photographs. Children interested in drama can learn about the Sergeants' Mess Pantomime in a small 'theatre style' dressing room complete with a mirror surrounded by light bulbs and a dressing up trunk with hats and clothes for children to try on. The Royal Marines pantomime was first staged in Deal in the 1950s and continued for several decades; it has recently been revived by former marines living in Deal. Upstairs your child will surely be impressed with nine amazing model boats and ships, including HMS Victory, built along the coast in Chatham's Royal Dockyard. Other models include the armed brig HMS Badger and the paddle steamer PS Princess Elizabeth which, your child will discover, had a fascinating history. Finally, as you leave the museum, look out for the beachcombing display by the entrance. It is quite amazing what gets washed up on the shore! And it might inspire your child to go for a walk along the beach.

www.dealmuseum.co.uk

The Hooden Horse



Saxon King



Pantomime programme



- Signposted from the A299 Thanet Way south of Margate, follow the brown 'propeller' signs around the perimeter of Manston Airport to the museum (CT12 5DF)
- No suitable public transport
- Museum open daily (closed Mondays in Jan and Feb); admission free; free parking shared with the RAF Manston History Museum
- Visitor reception with gift shop, accessible toilets and café close by
- Terrain: museum on one floor, accessible with wheelchairs (two manual wheelchairs available in the museum)
- Car park is close to a busy road
- Museum brightly lit
- Several mannequins
- Spitfire Hall has an interactive video with commentary and a Spitfire Simulator (pre-booking required) that may be noisy when in use
- Small handling collection comprising a reproduction gas mask, helmet and deactivated fire bomb
- Assistance dogs only in the museum, but dogs allowed in the grounds
- Informative factsheets and a quiz for older children available on the website 'Educational Resources' page.

Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum

up close to a real Spitfire and Hurricane...

The museum shares a car park with the RAF Manston History Museum, the two being just 100 m apart, so you could comfortably visit both museums on one visit. However, for children with autism who are sensitive to sudden changes in lighting and loud noises, or for those with a shorter attention span, the Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum might be the best choice. As its name suggests, the museum houses two iconic RAF fighter planes from the Second World War, a Spitfire and a Hurricane. It is a small museum, comprising two rooms: the Hurricane Hall and the Spitfire Hall. As you enter the museum, the first thing you will see is the Hurricane, standing in the middle of the room. The central area around the aircraft is roped off, so you cannot touch the aircraft, but there are display cases around the walls that include model aircraft, RAF uniforms and various artefacts relating to life with the RAF in Kent during the war. Alongside the hurricane is a BSA motor cycle that might interest some children, two Rolls Royce Merlin engines and a fire engine that served the RAF in Kent during the war.

The Spitfire Hall houses a Spitfire that saw action during the Second World War; together with more display cabinets of model aircraft and aircraft artefacts. The Spitfire Hall also includes an interactive video which is interesting to watch, but when it is used by others the commentary might startle some children. There is also a Spitfire Simulator that was first opened to the public in 2018. This may also be noisy when in use, and can be booked in advance on the museum website. Finally, on Sundays you may find various hats on the shop counter for your child to try on, including a flying helmet and goggles, an RAF officer's peaked hat and an ARP helmet.

www.spitfiremuseum.org.uk

Hurricane (Tone Blakesley)



RAF fire engine (Tone Blakesley)



- Signposted from the A299 Thanet Way south of Margate, follow the brown 'propeller' signs around the perimeter of Manston Airport to the museum (CT12 5DF)

- No suitable public transport

- Museum open daily Mar to Oct, then weekends Nov to Feb; small admission charge and free parking shared with the Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum

- Visitor reception with gift shop, toilets close by

- Terrain: level ground floor, steps to first floor by entrance, or ramp at the far end of the museum via the '1940s experience'; steps allow visitors to view the cockpits of several aircraft

- Car park is close to a busy road

- Museum is generally well lit, but the '1940s Experience' is dimly lit, with loud noises and flashing lights (can be avoided)

- Several mannequins

- Dogs should be on lead

- Informative website with photographs and information on many of the exhibits.

RAF Manston History Museum

ideal for young aircraft enthusiasts!

The RAF Manston History Museum is more extensive than its neighbour, with more static aircraft on display and many more exhibits about the history of RAF Manston. It is an exciting museum for a child to explore, but if your child is sensitive to noise or low light, you may want to avoid the '1940s Experience', designed to show visitors how local people in Kent experienced the Second World War during periods of bombing and food shortages. The lights are dimmed in this small part of the museum, with the sounds of aircraft overhead, artillery, an air raid siren, a commentary, together with flashing lights. Ask at the reception if you wish to avoid this area as you walk around. One of the first rooms you come to displays aircraft cockpits, including those of a Blackburn Buccaneer and a Handley-Page Victor that you can view by climbing a short flight of steps. Children might be amazed to see these cockpits, which look very different to pictures they may have seen of modern aircraft flight decks.

Close by, a much larger room includes a Canadair T-133 Silver Star, a Westland Wessex rescue helicopter and a replica Sopwith 1½ Strutter biplane. Another room houses a Gloster Meteor (Britain's first jet fighter), de Havilland Chipmunk and displays of radio equipment. Two videos with sound play on a loop in this room, including one about the testing of the 'Bouncing Bomb' at Herne Bay, that was used to breach the dams of the Ruhr Valley in 1943. The remains of one of the practice bombs is on display (note it has sharp edges). In addition to static aircraft, the museum displays aircraft artefacts such as a jet engine and ejector seat, and various small-scale model aircraft. The first floor includes more model aircraft, and a model railway depicting RAF Manston in the 1930s (it can be operated via a coin slot). Outside the museum you will find a Jet Provost, a Polish jet trainer and a Jaguar jet aircraft.

www.rafmanston.co.uk

Canadair T-133 Silver Star (Tone Blakesley)



- Entrance on Castle Hill Road (A258), accessed from the A2 north of Dover, or the town centre (CT16 1HU)

- Public transport: Stagecoach buses from Dover to Sandwich/Deal (daily) stop on Castle Hill Road, walk into castle from here

- Open daily in summer, weekends in winter, but check website for details; admission charge (free for two carers and English Heritage members); large free car park

- Accessible toilets and several cafés

- Terrain: extensive grounds with accessible tarmac paths, some steep slopes; some gravel and cobble stone paths; steep staircases and uneven floors in the medieval part of the castle; steep slope with handrail in dimly lit medieval tunnels; steep slopes with handrails in secret tunnels; steps elsewhere on site; parents should consult detailed Access and Health and Safety information on website

- Very steep grassy banks and sheer drops

- Quiet area: many quiet areas across an extensive site

- Wartime tunnels – guided tours only

- Vehicles on site including land train (with wheelchair lift) for visitors

- Low lighting in many buildings

- Mannequins in several galleries

- Dogs should be on lead.

Dover Castle

a fantastic castle to explore...

Dover Castle is a medieval castle standing on Dover's White Cliffs, overlooking the town, the harbour and the English Channel. From the battlements children can watch cross channel ferries leaving port; on clear days you can see the white cliffs on the distant French coast. Because of its strategic significance, the site is steeped in history; fortifications are thought to date back to the Iron Age, and there are stories to tell from the time of the Romans through to the Second World War. Many children with autism will find the castle itself, the medieval tunnels and the secret wartime tunnels exciting places to explore – something of an adventure – but for children who have difficulties with mobility, access at this location can be very challenging.

Closest to the ticket office is the Roman lighthouse (known as a 'Pharos') and Saxon church. The Pharos stands 15.8 m high, and with a beacon burning on top, would have guided Roman ships into the Port of Dover, or Dubris as it was known in Roman times. It is astonishing that it is one of only three surviving lighthouses across the Roman empire, imagine that! The restored Saxon church of St Mary-in-Castro standing next to the Pharos was built over 1,000 years ago. Inside it is cool and peaceful; stained glass windows cast colourful shadows; a small display case of Roman tiles and pottery and local fossils might interest your child. From here, it is a short walk to the medieval castle

Dover Castle



itself, perhaps the highlight of a visit for many children. Explain to your child that the 'Great Tower' was built by Henry II in the 1180s as a palace fit for a king. There are three floors to explore, following winding spiral staircases and sometimes narrow passes, to find rooms that have been recreated to look much as they would have done in the 1180s. For example on the ground floor you will find a great kitchen used to prepare food for the King and his guests. On the upper floors you will discover a banqueting hall and at the top of the castle, the King's bed chamber. Even from the reconstructions it is clear that the castle interior was designed to show off the King's wealth. You may come across the well chamber in a side room – the well that supplied the castle with water was sunk over 122 m into the chalk below! Continuing upwards, views from the roof across the North Downs, the port of Dover and the English Channel are fantastic.

Close to the Great Tower are the medieval tunnels; another adventure down a spiral staircase and steeply sloping tunnel, to explore stairways and passageways constructed in the 13th century to help defend the castle. The light is dim in places and the rooms and passageways have an eerie echo. Also close by is the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment Museum – parents should be aware that this contains mannequins and includes displays about the First World War including a machine gun and the sounds of battle. Finally, if your child enjoyed the medieval tunnels, there are the Secret Wartime Tunnels and underground World War Two hospital to explore, if they are comfortable with joining a guided tour with a larger group of people. Dover Castle can be busy at holiday times, especially on event days, so it is worth checking the website before planning your visit.

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/dover-castle/

Roman lighthouse



Great Tower (Tone Blakesley)



Further Reading

Web resources

IncludesUs2. Parent driven charity for families with children with additional needs:
www.facebook.com/IncludesUs2

Kent Autistic Trust:
www.kentautistictrust.org/

Kent County Council. Autism Pathway – from diagnosis to long term support:
www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/70293/Autism-Pathway-Children.pdf

Kent County Council community transport:
www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/community-transport

Kent Downs AONB:
www.kentdowns.org.uk

Kent Orchards. Discovering heritage orchards:
<http://kentorchards.org.uk>

National Autistic Society. Going to a museum:
www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/

National Rail Enquiries:
www.nationalrail.co.uk

Open Britain. Accessible tourism in the UK:
www.openbritain.net

Streetmap:
www.streetmap.co.uk

Traveline south east:
www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk

Visit Canterbury. Promoting Canterbury's heritage sites:
www.canterbury.co.uk

Visit Kent. Promoting Kent attractions:
www.visitkent.co.uk

Wheels of Time. Badge collecting scheme encouraging exploration of Kent heritage places:
<http://wheelsoftime.uk>

Popular guides

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2015. *Alex and Rosie's Adventures in Kent*. Free to download:
www.autismandnature.org.uk

Blakesley, D and Blakesley, T. 2019. *Alex and Rosie's Kent Colouring Book*. Free to download:
www.autismandnature.org.uk

Blakesley, D and Payne, S. 2012. *Visiting the Kent countryside: a guide for parents of children with autism*. Free to download:
www.autismandnature.org.uk

Cameron, J. 2007. *Kiddiwalks in Kent*. Countryside Books, Newbury.



This guide is the second in a series of local heritage guides designed to help parents, carers and teachers to engage children with autism and related conditions with their local heritage. It presents a guide to twenty-four historic and cultural heritage places to visit in Kent, including fantastic museums, castles steeped in history, a Roman fort, heritage steam railways and a working windmill. Where possible we have chosen heritage places that are located in the countryside, by the sea, or set in peaceful gardens, offering calm places for children to retire to during a visit. The description of each place should help parents and carers to judge its suitability for their child and make visits as relaxed and enjoyable as possible, so that the benefits can be appreciated by all the family.

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