



Oare Gunpowder Works Country Park

Guide and Information



Industrial Heritage and Nature Trail

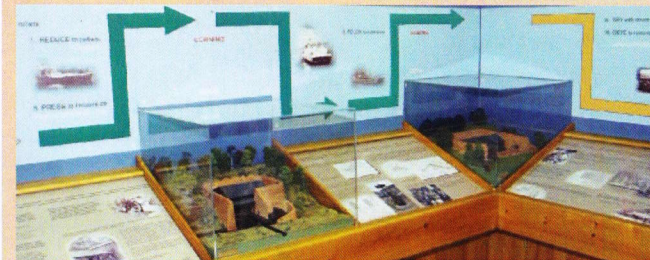
www.gunpowderworks.co.uk

 oare gunpowder works

Welcome

This guide helps you explore and learn about Oare Gunpowder Works site which contains the remains of a former gunpowder factory that is known to have been in production from the late seventeenth century until 1934.

In addition to the industrial remains, the site provides a range of wildlife habitats which are all being conserved and expanded to increase their value to a wide range of trees, plants, animals, birds and insects.

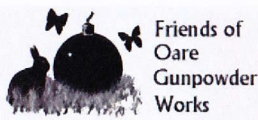


The Cooperage, one of the buildings in which the barrels were made, now houses the Visitor Centre. It offers a wealth of information on the history of gunpowder manufacture at Oare and on the wildlife habitats on site.

www.gunpowderworks.co.uk



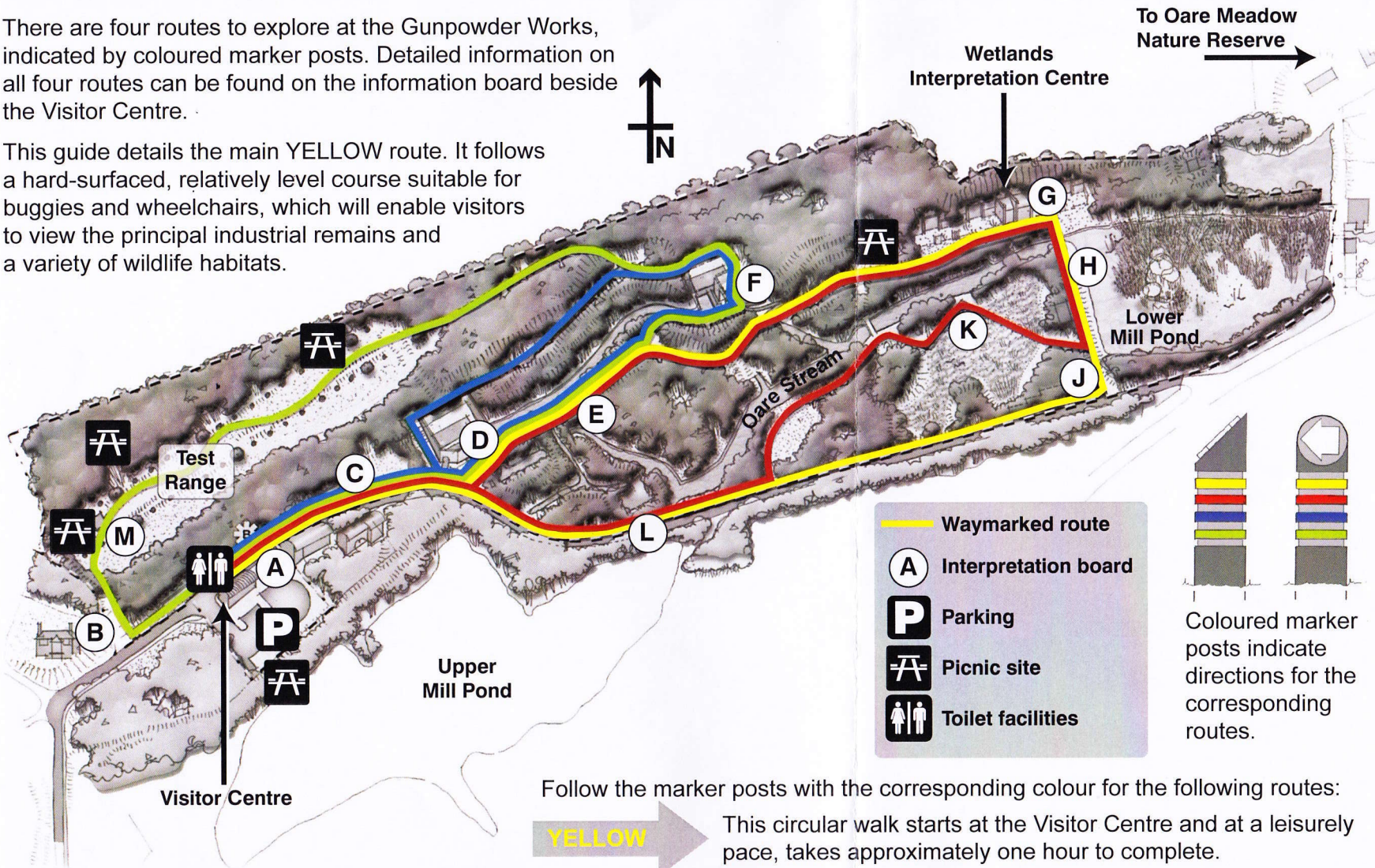
Green Heritage Site 



Oare Gunpowder Works – Heritage and Nature Trail

There are four routes to explore at the Gunpowder Works, indicated by coloured marker posts. Detailed information on all four routes can be found on the information board beside the Visitor Centre.

This guide details the main YELLOW route. It follows a hard-surfaced, relatively level course suitable for buggies and wheelchairs, which will enable visitors to view the principal industrial remains and a variety of wildlife habitats.



Follow the marker posts with the corresponding colour for the following routes:

YELLOW

This circular walk starts at the Visitor Centre and at a leisurely pace, takes approximately one hour to complete.

RED

This walk guides you along the Leats and the Oare Stream past several industrial remains to the Interpretation Centre and across the marshland boardwalk.

BLUE

This circular walk will guide you through the woodlands past several industrial remains surrounding the Upper Leat.

GREEN

This walk leads past the Upper Leat, through woodland and across the Test Range passing the remains of several buildings.

Please be aware, these routes include steps and steeper inclines.

Plants

Bluebell

Although much of the woodland on the site was deliberately planted to act as blast screening, the presence of ancient woodland indicator species, such as bluebell and dog's mercury suggest that there are remnants of a much older woodland on the lower ground, alongside the stream. The bluebells have subsequently spread through the woodlands that were planted later and form an intensely coloured carpet in spring.

Alder

Coppiced woodland was used to provide a regular supply of charcoal for the gunpowder manufacturing process. Alder, willow and dogwood were preferred; the wood had to be fairly straight, was peeled clean of bark and cut into even lengths to fit closely into the cylinders for processing. About two tons of wood produced enough charcoal for one ton of gunpowder.

Ferns

Damp-loving plants, such as ferns can be found alongside the water courses and have been found growing in the walls of the Upper Leat at the Corning House.

To Oare Meadow Nature Reserve

Wetlands Interpretation Centre

Lower Mill Pond

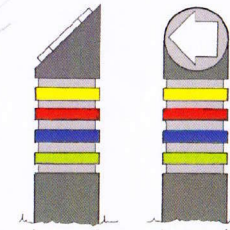
Oare Stream

Test Range

Upper Mill Pond

Visitor Centre

- Waymarked route
- Interpretation board
- Parking
- Picnic site
- Toilet facilities



Coloured marker posts indicate directions for the corresponding routes.

A Visitor Centre

You may begin your tour of Oare Gunpowder Works at the Visitor Centre, which offers a wealth of information on the Oare site. Once the building housed the Cooperage, where barrels were made for transportation of the gunpowder.

B Foreman's House, Offices and Packing Room

The building further down the track to your left was used as the Foreman's House since it was constructed in 1846-1865. The wall opposite the entrance to the car park is what remains of the Administration Offices and Packing Room.

C Nos. 1 & 2 Incorporating Mills

At the Incorporating Mills the three ingredients of gunpowder – sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal – were blended under the pressure of heavy edge-runner wheels. Remaining here are the bases of the wheels and the back 'blast' wall.

D The Glazing House

Built in 1844, the Glazing House is where the grains of gunpowder were treated to give them a final coating to improve their resistance to moisture. By 1865 it was enclosed in a 'blast' wall, much of which you can see today.

E The Leats

The Leats were a series of canals created to provide power for machinery and for the safe transport of gunpowder around the site in wooden 'Powder Punts'. Most of the Leats still contain water and provide a valuable wildlife habitat.

F The Corning House

Slabs of gunpowder arrived at the Corning House from the Press House to be reduced to grains or 'corns'. This Corning House was built in 1845 and was originally powered by a waterwheel. Today the damp blast walls offer good conditions for damp-loving plants such as ferns and mosses.

G 1926 Incorporating Mills

These electrically driven mills blended the constituents of gunpowder under huge iron edge-runner wheels. The long concrete base and brick walls are all that remain. A reconstruction of the Motor Room and one Mill House accommodate the Wetlands Interpretation Centre and one set of machinery.

H Lower Mill Pond

The Pond was one of two reservoirs constructed to power waterwheels and by the year 1700 they were both driving gunpowder mills. The Pond supports a wide range of plants, animals and insects.

J Site of Stables

By the 1920's the site was served by horse-drawn powder trams; the Stables were located here. The marshland behind the site is an area frequented by insects including butterflies and dragonflies.

K Marshland Boardwalk

The area is currently being developed to encourage a greater variety of plant species that will in turn attract a greater number of insect species.

L The Press Houses

These woodlands were the location for the two Press Houses; one manual and one hydraulic, where gunpowder from the Incorporating Mills was pressed between copper plates into slabs in order to remove air and improve its quality. Today the woodlands are home to bats and a wide range of birds.

M Test Range and Laboratory

The various types of gunpowder at the Oare Works were tested here, surrounded by newly planted woodland. The brick and concrete footings are the remains of the Laboratory. The Test Range is managed as a woodland glade habitat to encourage plants, insects and birds. In spring the Test Range has a carpet of bluebells.

Wildlife

The woodland at Oare is home to a wide variety of birds, including many familiar species such as the house sparrow, blackbird and robin. Woodpeckers can often be seen and heard probing trees for wood-boring insects and larvae. During cold weather, migratory birds such as the goldcrest and redwing may also be found in the woods. In the spring, the trees are filled with birdsong of chiffchaff and sedge warbler, and the cuckoo may also be heard.



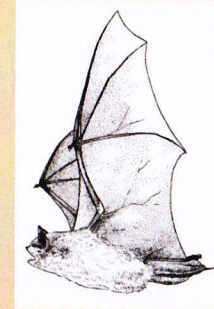
Redwing

The ponds and reedbeds provide homes for coots, moorhens, kingfishers and the grey heron. The presence of the reed warbler, sedge warbler and reed bunting is an indicator of the quality of the reed beds at Oare. From spring through to autumn, swifts, swallows and house martins may be seen feeding on insects over the water.



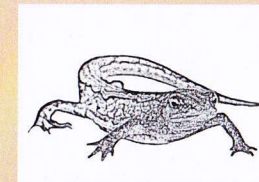
Sedge Warbler

The small crevices in masonry, buildings and trees provide ideal roosting and hibernation habitats for bats; Oare houses at least six species.



Daubenton's bat

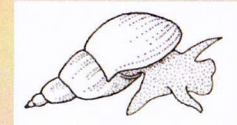
Other mammals that are likely to be found at Oare include hedgehogs, foxes and several small mammals, such as common shrews, bank voles, and woodmice.



Smooth Newt

The grass snake can occasionally be seen in and around the ponds at Oare. It preys upon small frogs and toads which also live there. Smooth, and palmate newts, have all been found, as have slow worms, a type of legless lizard, often mistaken for a snake.

The variety of habitats at Oare provides for a wealth of different species of insects and invertebrates. Many species of dragonfly and damselfly can be seen around the ponds where they prey on smaller insects including various small flies and mosquitoes. The ponds are also home to aquatic invertebrates including the pond skater, water boatman and ramshorn snail.



Greater pond snail

Grasshoppers and crickets can be seen and heard in the grassland areas on hot summers days when they are particularly active. Many different butterflies can also be seen in the grassy glades, and around patches of nettles where they lay their eggs, these hatch into caterpillars and eat the nettle leaves.



Tortoiseshell butterfly

Leaf litter is food and home to many invertebrates and insects including, centipedes and millipedes, slugs, snails, woodlice and predatory beetles.

History of the site

Faversham was a prime gunpowder making area and by the 17th century there were two gunpowder works on the current site; one was operated by Peter Azire and the other by Francis Grueber – both Huguenot refugees who had been driven out of France by religious persecution in the 1680s.

By 1844 both gunpowder mills were being operated as a single works by the family firm John Hall & Co, who had acquired part of the site in 1812.

The works were refurbished in 1926 and continued to be used for the production of gunpowder until their closure in 1934. For more than seventy years the gates were closed and nature was allowed to take its course.

It was not until 2004 that the sensitive intervention was introduced to ensure conservation and improvement of the site as a wildlife habitat, and to preserve the remaining building structures.

Industrial remains

The remaining buildings on the site include the Foreman's House (now restored), buildings where the various stages of gunpowder production took place, and the converted cooperage.

The site includes not only remains of the structures, in which gunpowder was manufactured, tested, packed and stored but also a series of ponds and canals or 'leats', used to transport people and materials around the site.

Part of the industrial remains are the extensive areas of woodland planted on what was previously farmland, to form blast screens intended to reduce the damaging effects of explosions.

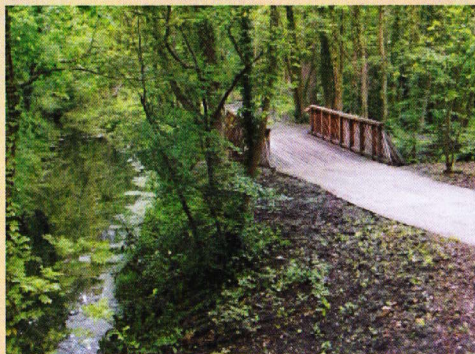
The remains of the Gunpowder Works were designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1999. The reed beds in the Lower Mill Pond form part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Wildlife habitats

The site provides a number of habitats which include buildings, woodland, grassland, and wetlands. These are being managed and improved for a variety of wildlife.

Herb and scrub zones have been created on the sides of the tracks, to provide clear flight ways for the many bats and birds that live at Oare.

In places where they will not pose a danger to visitors, some dead and dying trees and logs have been left to attract a variety of wildlife.



Woodland management

The woodland is being managed as a wildlife habitat by gradually reducing the tree canopy to encourage more ground flora which will help to increase insect abundance and species diversity.

Coppicing is a traditional woodland management system which involves cutting trees down to stumps on a rotational basis. These then re-sprout and are ready to be harvested on the next rotation. This provides a regular supply of relatively straight timber of a consistent diameter for particular uses.

Present day management will involve coppicing on a seven to ten year rotation and selective felling of non-native species such as sycamore, will be replaced with local native species.

Getting involved

We run guided walks for schools and community groups, and holiday activities for families throughout the year. Please contact us for further details.

Volunteer activities

The site is managed with the help of local volunteers. Activities range from woodland management to staffing the Visitor Centre and assisting with educational activities.

The Friends of Oare Gunpowder Works is a group of like-minded enthusiasts dedicated to looking after the country park.

If you would like to get involved and wish to find out more about volunteering opportunities please contact us for further details.

Volunteer opportunities

Woodland maintenance

Every Thursday 10am-2pm with the Park Ranger

Woodland maintenance, wildlife recording, events, training opportunities

Second Sunday each month 10.30am-3pm with Friends of Oare Gunpowder Works. Volunteers meet at the Visitor Centre – appropriate footwear and clothing required. For more information email: countryparks@swale.gov.uk

Opening times

Car Park:

Open daily 9am –5pm Monday to Friday
10am – 4pm Weekends

Visitor Centre:

Open at weekends and bank holidays
10am – 4pm mid-March to mid-November.

Car parking is free of charge. The site has disabled access, and toilet facilities are available when the visitor's centre is open.

Contact

If you would like to know more, please contact:

Swale Borough Council

Swale House, East Street,
Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT
Tel: 01795 417850 or
01795 539792 (Visitor Centre)
countryparks@swale.gov.uk

Location

The Oare Gunpowder Works are located just off Bysing Wood Road, north-west of Faversham, just off the B2045 Western Link to Oare. The postcode for Bysing Wood Road is ME13 7UD.

From Faversham Railway Station Oare is a 2.5 mile walk or a short bus ride from the town centre on route 333. Links are also provided to national Cycle Route 1.