

The English painter John Constable (1776-1837) visited Gillingham many times to stay with his friend John Fisher, Vicar of Gillingham. The vicarage where he stayed is now Rawson Court opposite the Town Meadow. He found much inspiration here. Gillingham Museum, opposite Waitrose, has a permanent exhibition about his time here and featuring copies of his work.

1. From the Town Meadow, turn right onto the High Street

*Constable's painting "Gillingham Bridge" (1823) is of this bridge. Only the bridge and the church in the background remain from the view he painted. It now hangs in the Tate Gallery, London.*

Now turn immediately left in front of the Methodist Church. Keep right and follow the footpath between two bungalows in top right-hand corner. Follow the tarmac path and take waymarked path first left. Continue ahead along the lane to the T-junction and turn right. Take care here as there is no pavement.

2. After 100 yards turn left along short track. Go through the gate and keeping to the higher ground go through two gates in the hedge. Keep straight ahead, parallel to Shreen Water as far as a footbridge on the left. (Note. This part of the walk can be very wet and muddy after heavy rain). Bear right uphill across the field to a pedestrian gate. Then go straight ahead and over a ditch to come out onto a lane.

3. Turn left and follow the lane passing the ford and several cottages. At the T-junction turn right and follow this lane to Purns Mill. The best view of the mill is from the public footpath signposted left.

*Formerly known as Parham's Mill, this was where Constable painted "A Mill in Gillingham, Dorsetshire". He considered it to be one of his best paintings. The painting featured a waterwheel which is no longer there.*

4. Retrace your steps back to the lane junction and continue ahead to the main Mere Road. Cross with care and follow the cycle path around Neal's Yard factory, past Ellie's wood. Continue along the Stour for about half a mile, crossing Wavering Lane (with bollards) and on to Roll's Bridge where there is a wildlife interpretation board. Cross the road and turn left and shortly take the footpath on your right. Pass the outdoor gym and over the footbridge. Cross the estate road and take footpath up between two houses.

5. This brings you to Wyke road which is very busy and with no pavement on this side. Cross with care and follow the narrow pavement down the hill to turning on right.

*Take a moment here to look down towards the old house Folly's End and the town centre. Constable painted this view on one of his many visits.*

6. At the bottom of the hill, cross at the traffic lights and go through gap in the wall. Continue into The Square and turn right in front of church gates back into the High Street.

