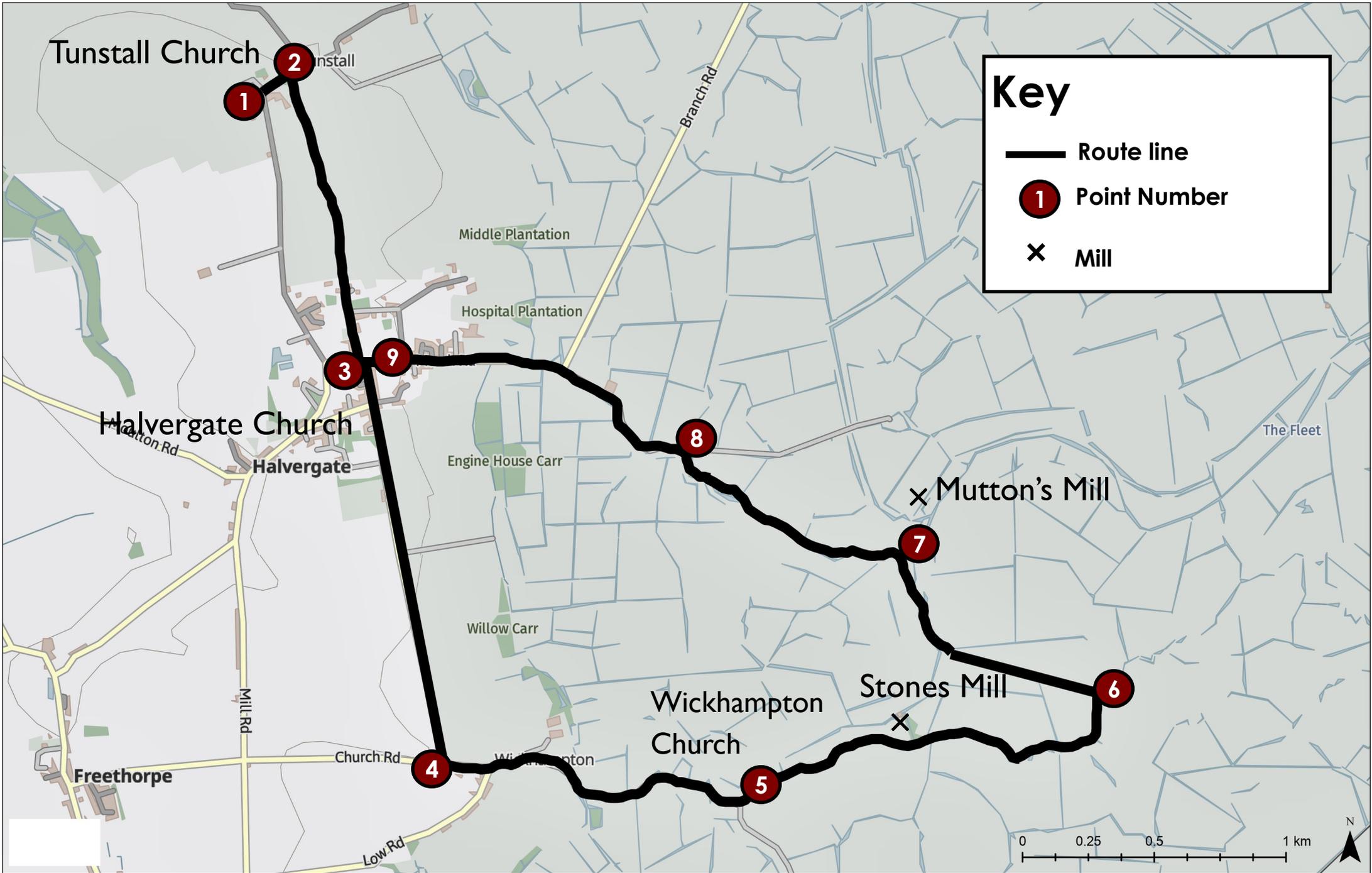




WATER, MILLS
& MARSHES

A background image showing a tall, cylindrical brick tower with several small windows, situated in a field of tall, dry grass. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The bottom half of the image is overlaid with a dark, semi-transparent band containing the main title.

THE WICKHAMPTON
WALK



Key

-  Route line
-  Point Number
-  Mill

For spooky season, Water, Mills and Marshes have teamed up with Weird Norfolk to bring you the first in a series of spooky Walks; The Wickhampton Walk. With people living here for centuries, the extraordinary Broads National Park is abundant in history and oozing with ghost stories and we are dying to share them with you. In this walk, find out how two brothers turned to stone, the tale of the Will o' the Wisp and why the Devil's Hell Hole is still bubbling away..

St Peter and St Paul Church, Tunstall



1 Begin this 6 mile circular route at the remains of St Peter and St Paul Church in Tunstall, NR13 3PS (Grid Ref: TG 4169 0798). This magnificent building now in ruins has lots of secrets within its derelict walls, so let us tell you of its fate and the story of the Devil's Hell Hole...

As the flames licked the stone walls and the building began to crack and fall, parishioners feared nothing would remain of their beloved church, a beacon for ships on the edge of a long-lost estuary which is now lonely marshland that stretches towards Great Yarmouth. A fierce fire had ravaged the church but its bells were left unscathed. They had escaped the blaze, falling on the floor quite safely. However, they became the centre of a blazing row between the parson and the churchwardens who battled over who should have them.

Legend has it that while the argument raged, the Devil saw his chance to settle the dispute and stepped into the smoking timbers of the ringing chamber and carried the bells away. He was spotted by the parson who began to furiously exorcise him as he stalked away from the church: "stop, in the name of God!" called the parson. In a bid to make a swift getaway, the Devil scabbled his way through the earth and towards his underworld lair, taking his stolen loot with him and creating a boggy pool of water, known locally as 'Hell Hole', which still ominously bubbles in the summertime and which local folk used to attribute to the continual sinking of the bells on their endless journey through the bottomless pit. Sometimes, on quiet nights, across the bogs and marshland can be heard the muffled peal of bells. Head north east towards the village centre until you reach point 2.

- 2** Residents of the village of Tunstall have spotted something strange lurking around these quiet roads what could it be..?

On many occasions, a large black cat has been spotted roaming the fields and marshes around Halvergate and Tunstall. Could it be an escaped Puma or Panther? Some locals have linked the stories and sightings to the mysterious disappearances of pet cats in the surrounding villages. Could it be explained by Tunstall's very real resident Wildcat, which has been roaming and living in the area for the last 12 years, surviving some incredibly harsh winters. Turn right, following the Weavers' Way waymarking and continue to point 3.

- 3** Continue along Baker's Road then onto Wickhampton Road until you reach point 4. For a short detour to Halvergate church instead turn right here onto Marsh Road and then left shortly after on to Sandhole Lane and the new St Peter and Pauls church in Halvergate is on your right.

A distant view of Tunstall Mill



A view over Halvergate Marshes

- 4** At this point turn left, and continue along the track until you reach point 5 at Wickhampton Church.
- 5** On reclaimed marshland, where the most frequent visitors are birds, the site of St Andrew's Church at Wickhampton was once covered by sea and now stands as a lonely beacon on the haunting expanse of Halvergate marsh. It is a place which inspires calm – unlike the story attached to the stone effigies it guards. Many a child has been told the cautionary tale of two local brothers who took extreme measures to resolve their differences. This is how the story goes...

Two brothers spent years arguing over their respective lands, which were adjacent to each other. Neither brother would concede and, over time, the dispute became ever more bitter and finally, became violent. Their final fight was so vicious that at precisely the same point, they tore the heart from each other with their bare hands – when God looked down on the brothers’ lifeless bodies, he was so appalled by their behaviour that he instantly turned them both to stone.

Local villagers bore the stone corpses – still grimly clutching the heart of their brother – into the church to serve as a reminder of the perils of fighting and the brothers’ lands were renamed Wicked Hampton, now shortened to Wickhampton, and Hell Fire Gate, now known as Halvergate. Legend has it that, over time, one brother’s heart has been worn away leaving just one grasping a heart with the other next to him.

Two stone effigies © Archant



Three Dead © Archant

Wickhampton church is also home to an incredible *Memento Mori*. The wall painting depicts the age-old legend of the three living and the three dead, which is thought to date back to French manuscripts from the 13th century. The legend involves three dead men meeting with three rich men – a duke, a count and a prince – and the latter being terrified by the encounter.

The dead, who represent the church, beg the living to repent: “Such as I was you are and such as I am you will be. Wealth, honour and power are of no value at the hour of your death.”

Continue along the track until you reach point 6.

6 At this point, turn left and follow the Weavers' Way signage along to point 7. Take care crossing the field if cattle are present. Spot the now derelict Stones Mill to your left spreading an eerie feeling over the fields.

7 Find yourself in the heart of the marshes, a feeling of loneliness and being far from civilisation with only cows for company. The Mill ahead of you is Muttons Mill a beacon in the flat landscape. These marshes among others in the broads have inspired many a tale of the Will O the wisp, sometimes referred to as Lantern Man. Lantern Man, has led Norfolk travellers a merry dance for hundreds of years. In 1799 Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote about the Lantern Man, or Will o' the Wisp as many called the ghostly lights that hover and wheel above boggy marshland on dark, moonless nights, in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. "About, about in reel and rout, the death-fires danced at

night; the water, like a witch's oil, burnt green and blue and white."

Coleridge's "death-fires" were first mentioned in print in 1563, described as ignis fatuus: "foolish fire that hurteth not but only feareth fooles." Forty years later, Shakespeare wrote of "wild fire" in Henry VI Part I, while Will o' the Wisp was first mentioned by the dramatist John Day in the early 1600s. Sir Isaac Newton wrote of the eerie marsh light in his opus Optick, published in 1704. Popular tradition said Will, the Lantern Man or Jack o' Lantern, carried candle-lit lanterns in the darkness to attract weary travellers, who they would lead across the marshes to their certain death.

In 1859, in a letter to a national newspaper, the anonymous 'EGR' spoke of seeing the mysterious 'ghost lights' in Norfolk regularly. "It is popularly believed that if a man with a lighted lantern goes near one, the enraged Lantern Man will knock him down and burst his lantern to pieces," he wrote. "More than one labourer has assured me that such a thing has happened to himself. Quest: can the lighted lantern have ignited (marsh) gas and caused an explosion which has startled the rustic and burst his lantern?"

Regardless of startled rustics and broken lanterns, the scientific explanation for Will o' the Wisps is a far cry from the romance and mysticism of folklore. It is believed the ghostly lights are produced when organic material decays, causing the oxidation of hydrogen phosphide and methane gas which produce a so-called 'cold flame'. Continue across the marsh to point 8 and turn left at parking area, follow Weavers's Way signage along Stone Road.



8 At this point you may feel less isolated and hear the hum of the Acle straight in the distance. The Acle straight is a stretch of road like no other in Norfolk, a spirit level which crosses the misty marshes to link a Broadland market town to the seaside. As its name suggests, the road is exceptionally straight - other than a curve where the Halvergate branch road joins it. It was close to this exact point where something very strange was spotted – the spectral figure of a man.

A driver passing the Halvergate turn-off, on their way to Acle watched in horror as a middle-aged man walked out into the centre of the road from the right-hand side and into the path of their car. With no time to stop, the figure turned to look at the driver and as he did so, the car passed straight through him. And it's not the first time that ghosts have been seen on this stretch of road – other drivers have reported seeing a phantom horse and cart crossing the road directly in the path of oncoming vehicles while other drivers have reported having a sudden impulse to brake violently and for no apparent reason at certain



A lonely marsh



Halvergate Marshes

points along the road, despite having seen nothing to lead them to the conclusion that an emergency stop was necessary. Have these apparitions wandered in across the road from the marshes you are now walking through? Continue along Stone Road until it meets Marsh Road until you reach point 9.

9 Pass through Halvergate village and past the Red Lion Pub (evening opening times only) where there is parking if you are using the facilities. However, as the evenings are drawing in much earlier, don't find yourself out on the marsh at dusk otherwise you might be in for a visit from the Lantern Man! At this point follow back the way you came to point 1.

This season also brings colder weather and muddier walking conditions. Be prepared before you venture out, dress appropriately, take suitable provisions and a route map with you. If you do not have a mobile phone to hand, let someone know where you are going. Be respectful of wildlife, take care around livestock and take your litter home with you. If in doubt follow the Countryside Code.