

Salt, saints and skylarks



St Cosmus and St Damian.
(By permission of Blean Church.)

The Blean and the ancient Salt Way

This section of the Crab and Winkle Way was once part of an ancient track known as the Salt Way. Taking the only good route possible, the track went through what was then known as the Forest of Blean, through a section of Clowes Wood. The track was used for the transport of salt from the salt pans of Seasalter through Whitstable and on to Canterbury. Salt was a highly valued and much needed commodity and this would have been a very busy trading route.

The 13th century salt works at Seasalter marshes are evidenced today by the remaining mounds. Charters from the 8th and 9th centuries record salt working at 'Herewic', one of three Saxon manors which made up the 'Witenstaple' area (later Whitstable).

A brief history of St Cosmus and St Damian in the Blean

A Roman villa occupied a site to the south-west of the present day church. Roman bricks can be seen in the west exterior wall, which may have come from the remains of the villa. Folklore suggests that around 598 AD, monks accompanying Augustine from Rome dedicated the villa's chapel to Saint Cosmus and Saint Damian here beside the ancient Salt Way. The Roman armies are also thought to have regarded the saints highly as physicians.

This chapel is mentioned in the Domesday Book but was pulled down and rebuilt in 1233, by order of the Crown. Over the centuries it has been modified. At one point the interior would have been quite colourful, with many stained glass windows, a painted rood screen, which would have separated the choir from the nave and several wall paintings dedicated to St. Thomas, the Virgin Mary, and of course Saint Cosmus and Saint



Salt mounds at Seasalter.

Damian. In the religious upheavals following the Reformation much of the interior was whitewashed - even the stone altar was broken up. A few small fragments of the chancel lancet stained windows are all that are left. At one time, the church site was moated, and its remains can still be seen over the fence on the south and west sides of the graveyard.

The skylark

From this site you look east across arable fields over toward Tyler Hill. Depending on the crop that is being grown and the time of year, you might be lucky enough to hear and see skylarks as they hover briefly before landing to forage for food. When singing the male can spiral upwards of 50 metres, sometimes going out of sight. Skylarks are monogamous and a pair will often remain together for life. They are birds of open grasslands, heaths, marshes, dunes and arable habitats. They build their nests in spring, in shallow depressions in the ground. Once relatively common, intensive farming has reduced their habitat and their numbers.



the **Blean** is just minutes away...

Covering over 11 square miles, the Blean is one of the largest and most distinctive areas of ancient woodland in England, important nationally for both its wildlife and its history. The Blean has been a working woodland for over a thousand years, and continues to provide woodland products, including firewood and fencing materials, for local people. The splendour and tranquillity of this special landscape can be enjoyed on a network of paths and trails. This panel is part of a series of 18 located around the Blean. To see all 18 panels, visit www.theblean.co.uk. For information about walking in Kent visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.

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