



Marconi Trail - Full Route

Explore what remains of Chelmsford's historical links to Marconi and the early days of the wireless radio on this lovely town walk.

Distance 8.9 kilometers / 5.5 miles

Duration 3 hours and 15 minutes



Wildlife



Water feature



Refreshments



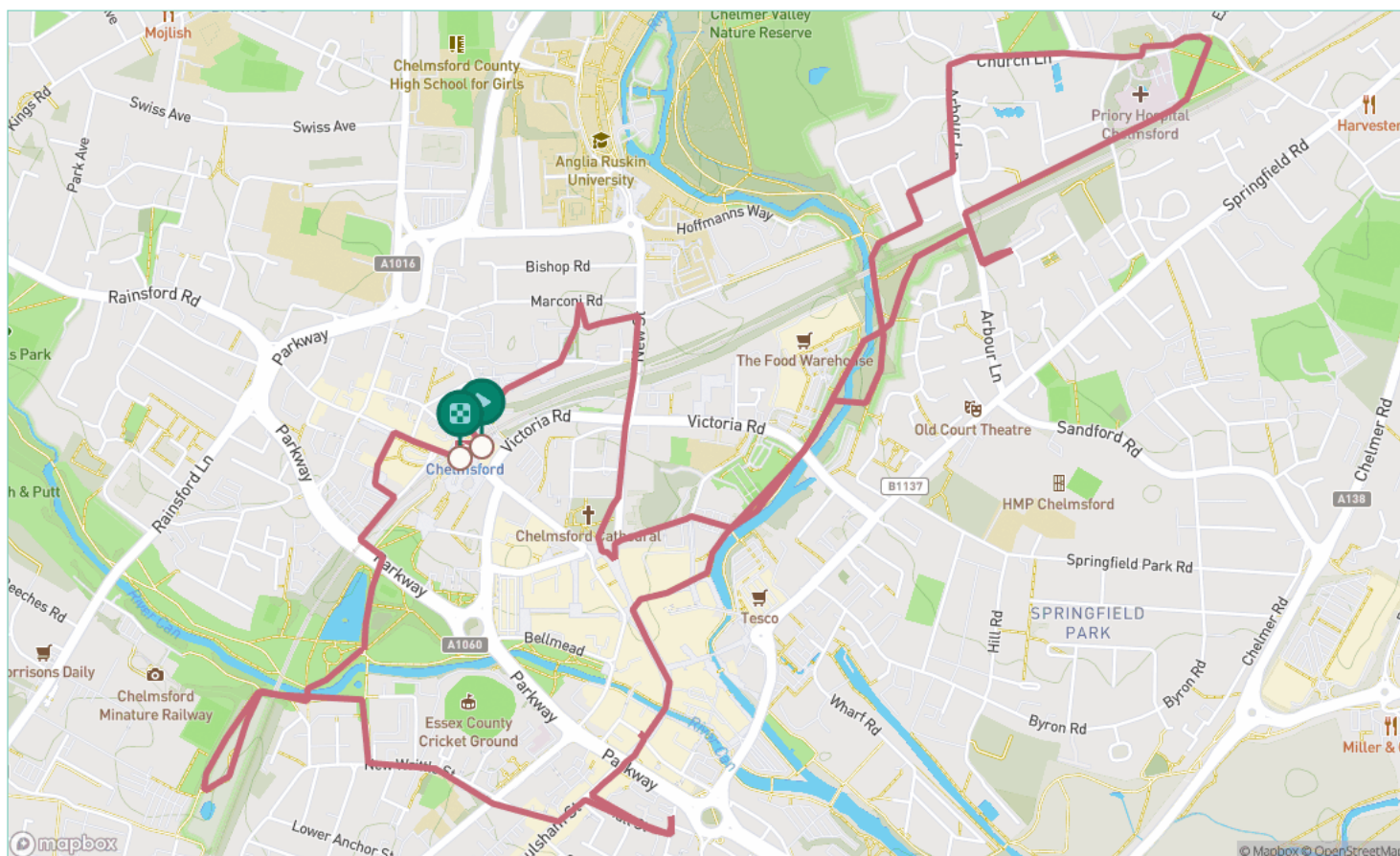
Public transport



History

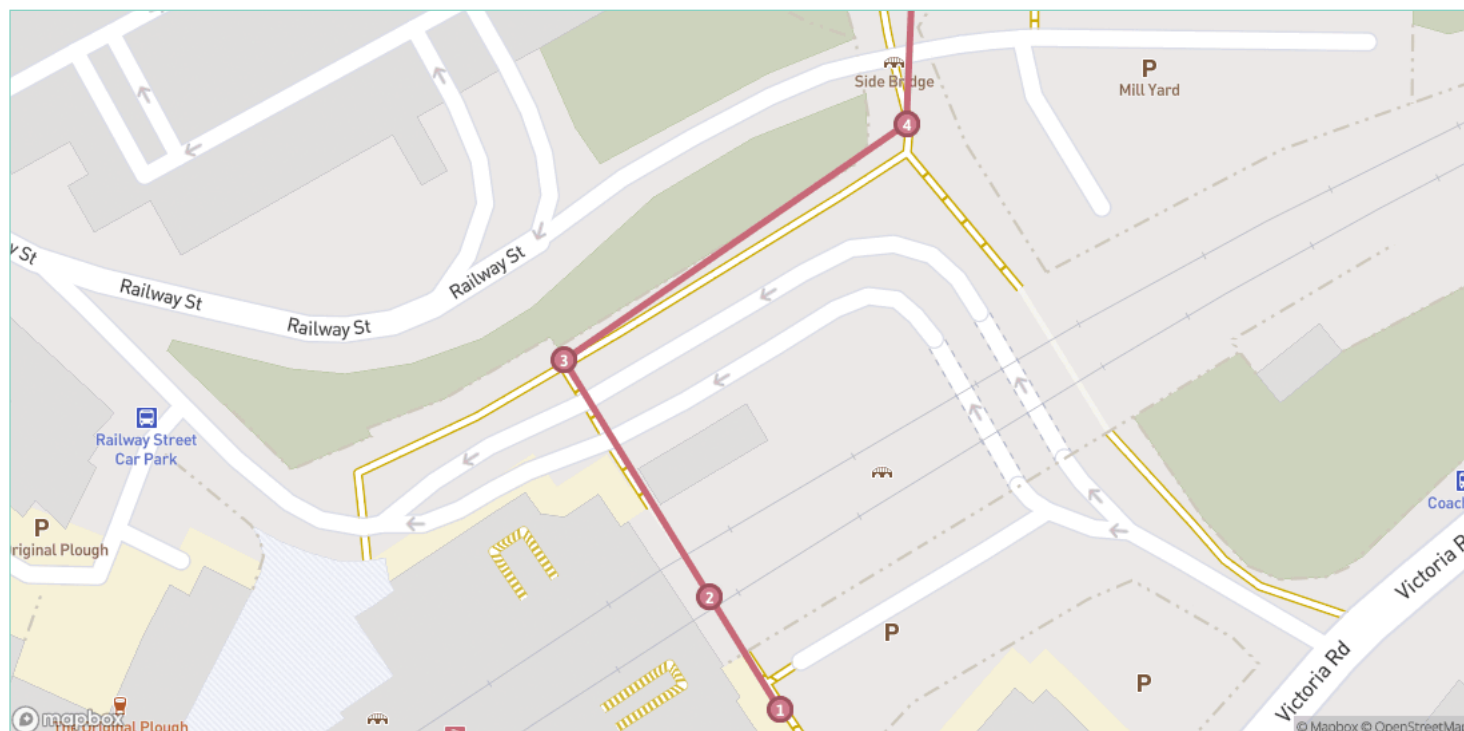


Dog friendly



Disclaimer: Directions are provided as guidance only. Weather, construction, closures or other factors may affect routes. Please take care when crossing roads and avoid private land. Always follow local signage and use common sense.

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Step 1: Welcome to Chelmsford! This walk begins at the main entrance of the railway station. Walk around the station or through it.

The Marconi Company



The Marconi Company was founded in 1897, under the name the 'Wireless and Signal Company', later changing to 'Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company' from 1900 until 1963. The Company was the first wireless company in the world, experimenting with telecommunications which was truly revolutionary in the early twentieth century. This walk will take you around Chelmsford, which was the base of the Marconi Company for a number of years. Engineering works in Chelmsford was dominated by 3 main companies: Marconi's, Hoffmann's and Crompton's. Its proximity to London, whilst also being surrounded by countryside made the town the perfect location for industry to flourish. On this walk you will be able to hear stories and memories from former employees of the Marconi Company and explore photographs from the archives at Essex

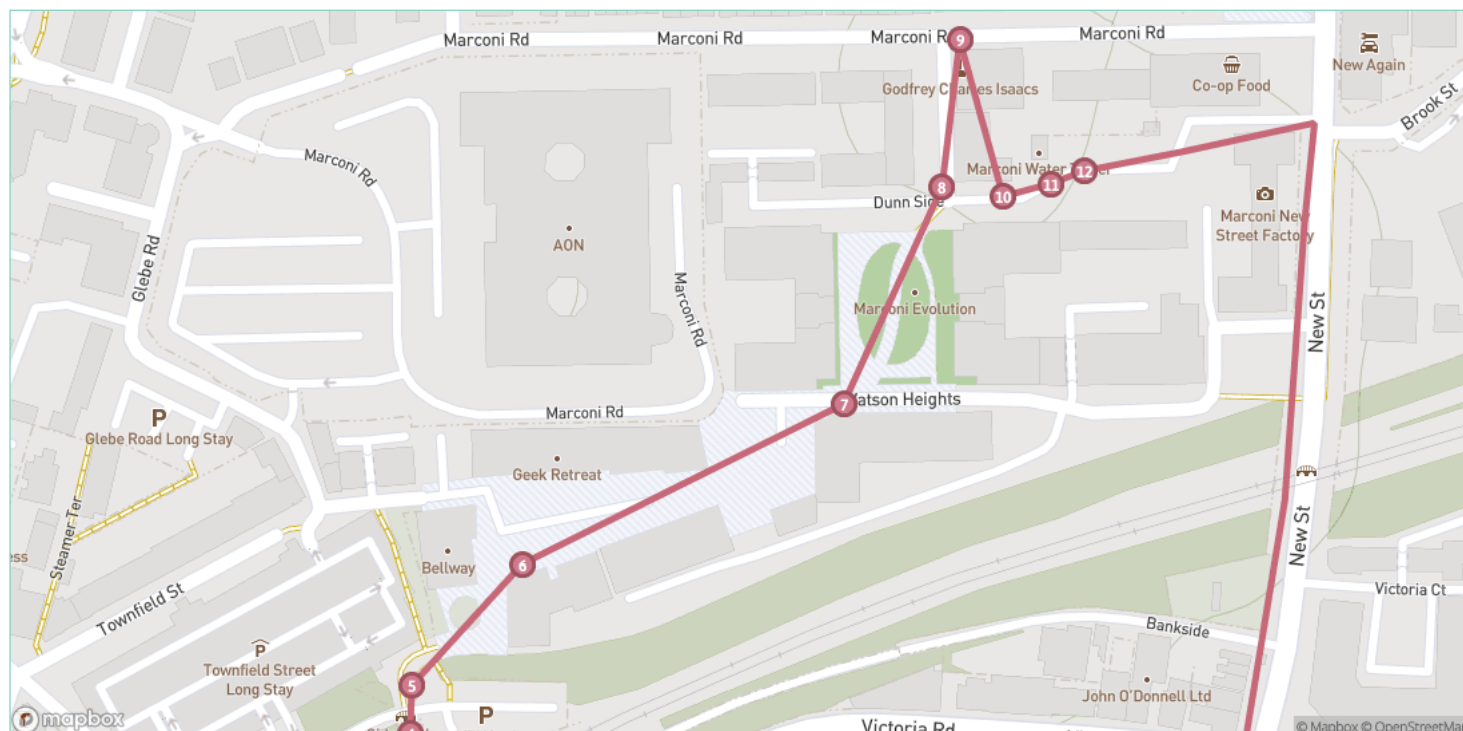
Record Office.



Step 2: On this walk you'll be able to hear stories & memories from former employees of the Marconi Company & explore photographs from the archives.

Step 3: Exit the rail station building and turn right on the shared path. There will be a brick wall to your left.

Step 4: Turn left at the end of the path. This is Mill Square, named after the former mills located along the railway. After the bridge, turn right.



Step 5: The whole area has been redeveloped but there are still signs of its past as you'll soon see. Continue past the tree to the other corner.

Step 6: You're now in "Cunard Square" the name of which represents the close link between Marconi radios and Cunard ships. Continue straight.

Step 7: Stick to the blue line as it snakes its way through the plaza. 🌀🌀

Step 8: Walk down Dunn Side road. You're heading to the building at the end on the right hand side, where Dunn Side meets Marconi Road.

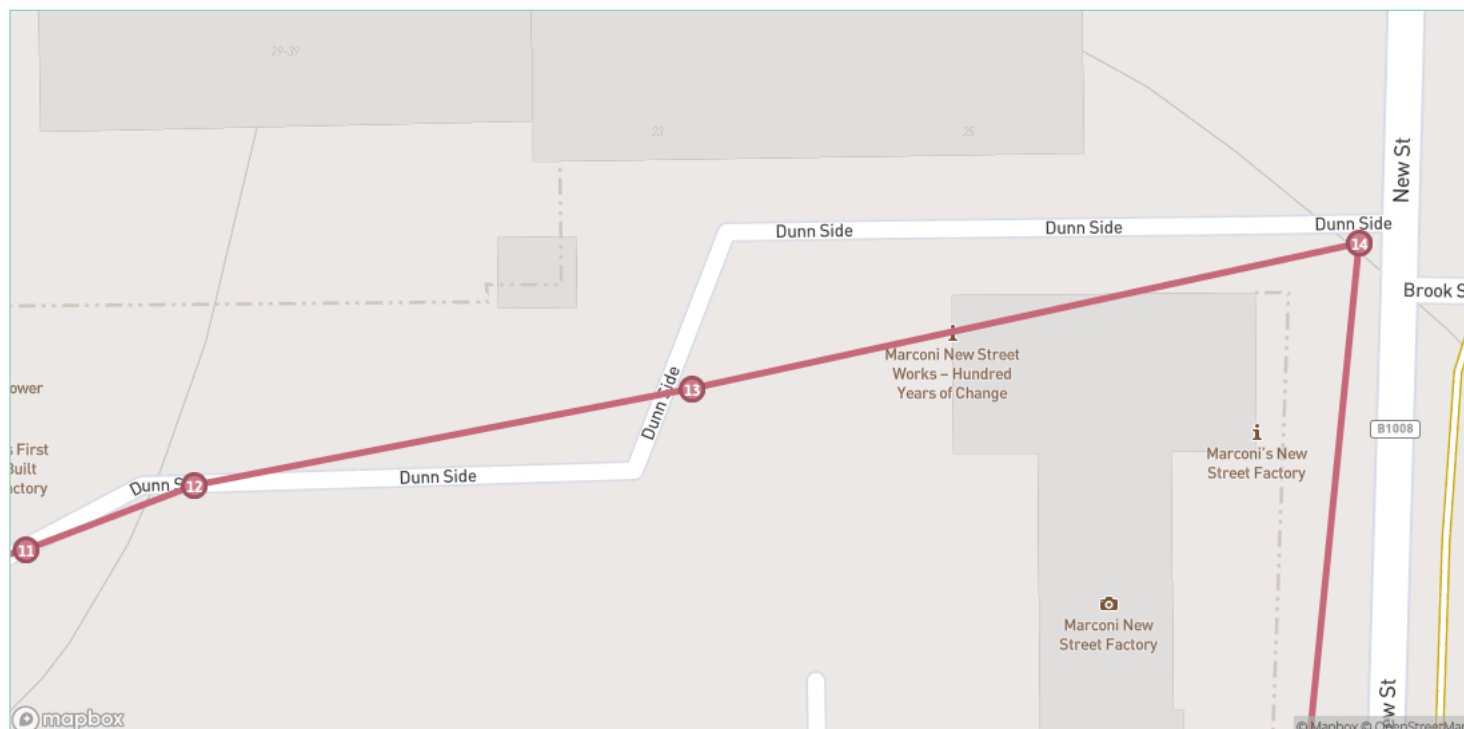
Step 9: This building is the former pump house. Note the blue plaque to Godfrey Isaacs, managing director of The Marconi Company from 1910-1924.

Godfrey Isaacs

Here we can see a plaque commemorating the life of Godfrey Isaacs, the Managing Director of the Marconi Company until 1924. He commissioned the building of the New Street Works, and was the force behind the upgrade from the smaller Hall Street site we saw earlier. He also pioneered an idea of a national broadcasting service, the BBC, and the licence fee. This plaque was also erected by the Chelmsford Civic Society.

Step 10: Return the way you came along Dunn Side road. Turn left at the junction to follow the blue line in the pavement towards the clock tower.

Step 11: On your left is the old water tower from Marconi's New Street Works factory.



Step 12: A few steps ahead, the exposed steel beams are from the original factory.

Step 13: The clock tower is at the rear of the Marconi building. Continue along Dunn Side so that we can pop around to its front.

Step 14: Turn right at the junction and follow the pavement along New Street.

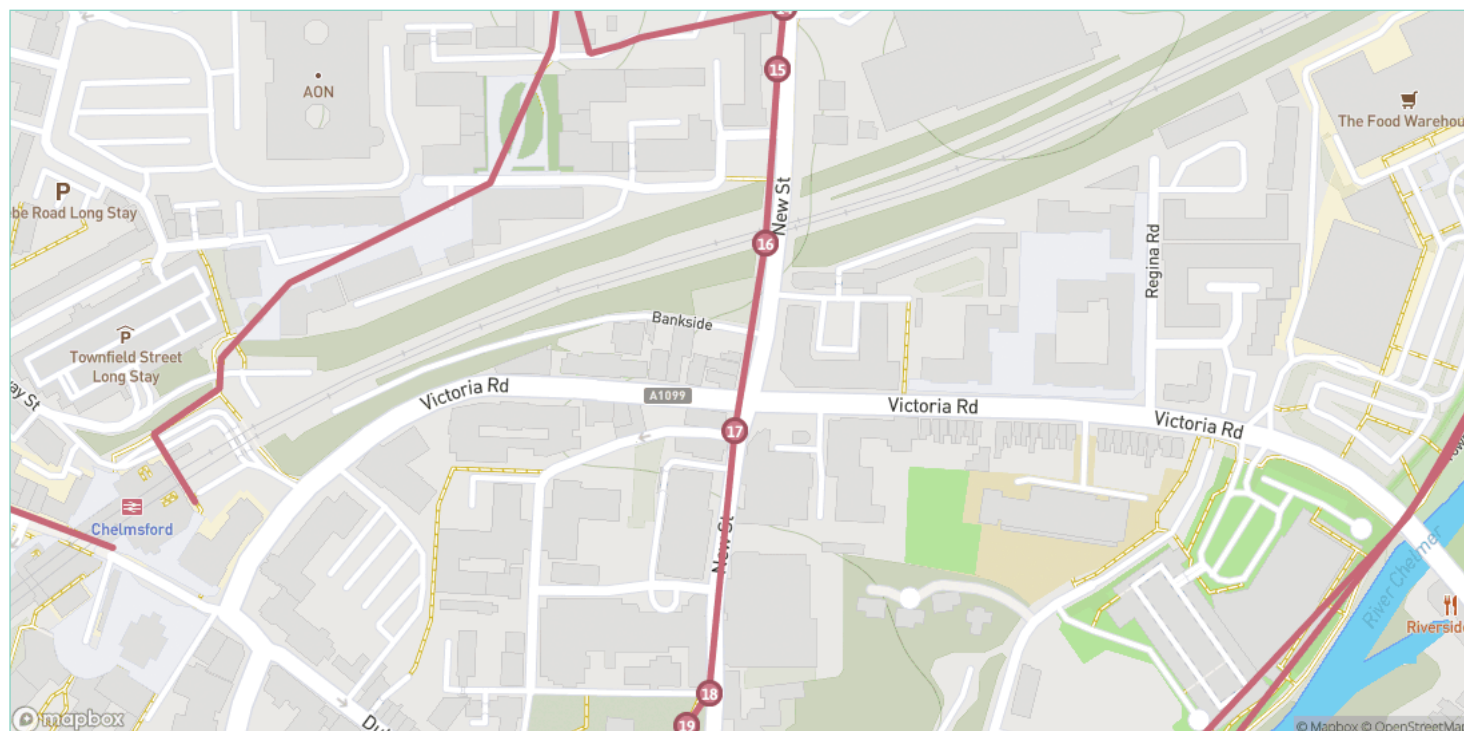
The New Street Works

Construction of Marconi House at the New Street Works. October 1938

This part of the New Street site was bustling at starting and clocking off time. Thousands of employees would come spilling out at lunch time, and many non-Marconi Chelmsford residents were told to avoid this part of town at 5 o'clock because of the amount of bikes leaving the New Street Works and speeding under the railway bridge!



Photograph of the New Street Works



Construction of Marconi House at the New Street Works, October 1938

Step 15: This is the world's first purpose-built wireless factory. It was from behind here that Dame Nellie Melba made her famous broadcast in 1920.

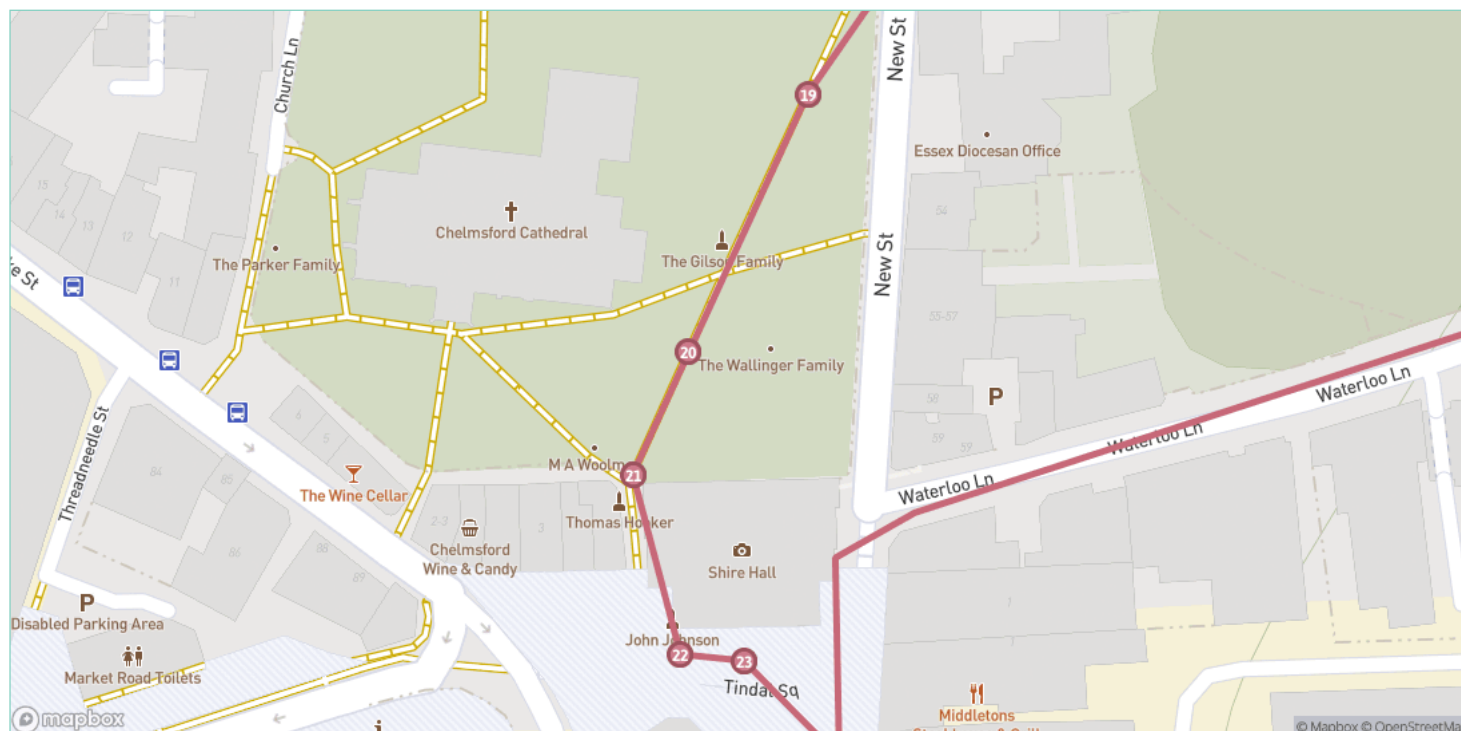
The First Live Broadcast

On 15th June 1920, Marconi technology was used in the first ever live entertainment broadcast. A famous Australian opera singer, Dame Nellie Melba, sang 'Home Sweet Home' live from a makeshift studio in one of the buildings on the New Street site at Chelmsford. It has been said that the broadcast could be heard from as far away as New York, and is probably the reason why you might know Chelmsford as 'the birthplace of radio'.

Step 16: Continue following the pavement under the railway viaduct.

Step 17: Cross Victoria Road and any other side roads, continuing ahead on the right-hand side of New Street.

Step 18: Turn right into Church Street.



Step 19: Cross Church St and enter the churchyard of the Chelmsford Cathedral, parts of which date back to the 13th century.

Step 20: Continue on the path straight ahead, following the paving stones towards the gap in the buildings.

Step 21: The blue plaque on the left honours Thomas Hooker, a “Father of American Democracy,” who lived and preached for a time in Chelmsford.

Step 22: Head through the footpath to Shire Hall. It was designed by John Johnson and opened in 1791. It housed the County Court until 2012.

Step 23: Follow the pavement around to the front of Shire Hall, with the hall on your left. Across the street, you’ll see the Saracen’s Head Hotel.

Saracen's Head Hotel

Mr Marconi himself is known to have made this hotel his base when visiting Chelmsford from London. Its proximity to both Shire Hall and the Marconi New Street works made it an ideal stop-off for the founder of the Company.





Step 24: On the wall of the hotel is a blue plaque for Guglielmo Marconi, who stayed at the hotel when visiting Chelmsford between 1912 and 1928.

Guglielmo Marconi Plaque

To the left of the door we can see a plaque commemorating Guglielmo Marconi, erected by the Chelmsford Civic Society.

Step 25: Continue following the pavement to the left around the edge of the Shire Hall.

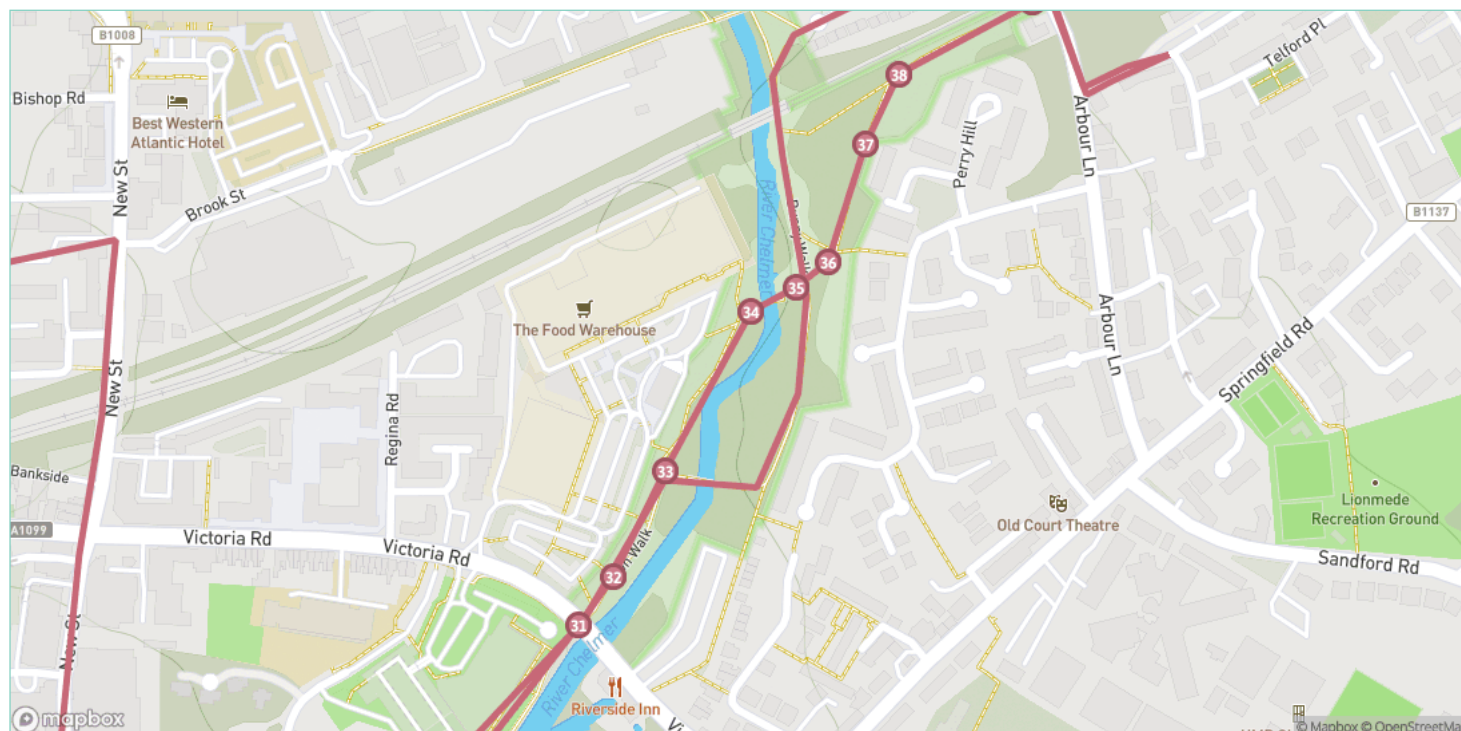
Step 26: Turn right down Waterloo Lane. Behind you is another great view of the Cathedral!

Step 27: Cross Bond Street then briefly continue on Waterloo Road as it heads left.

Step 28: Cross the entrance to the car park and then turn right to walk along the pavement opposite.

Step 29: Turn left once you're next to the river (you're headed towards Springfield if you're looking at the signpost).

Step 30: You've reached the lovely path along the River Chelmer with its weeping willows along the bank.



Step 31: Use the pedestrian crossing to head over Victoria Road and continue straight ahead on the shared-use path.

Step 32: The Chelmer Valley Local Nature Reserve preserves natural space along a part of the river. Look out for local wildlife and marshland.

Step 33: When you reach a footbridge on your right, continue straight on to stay on the left hand side of the river.

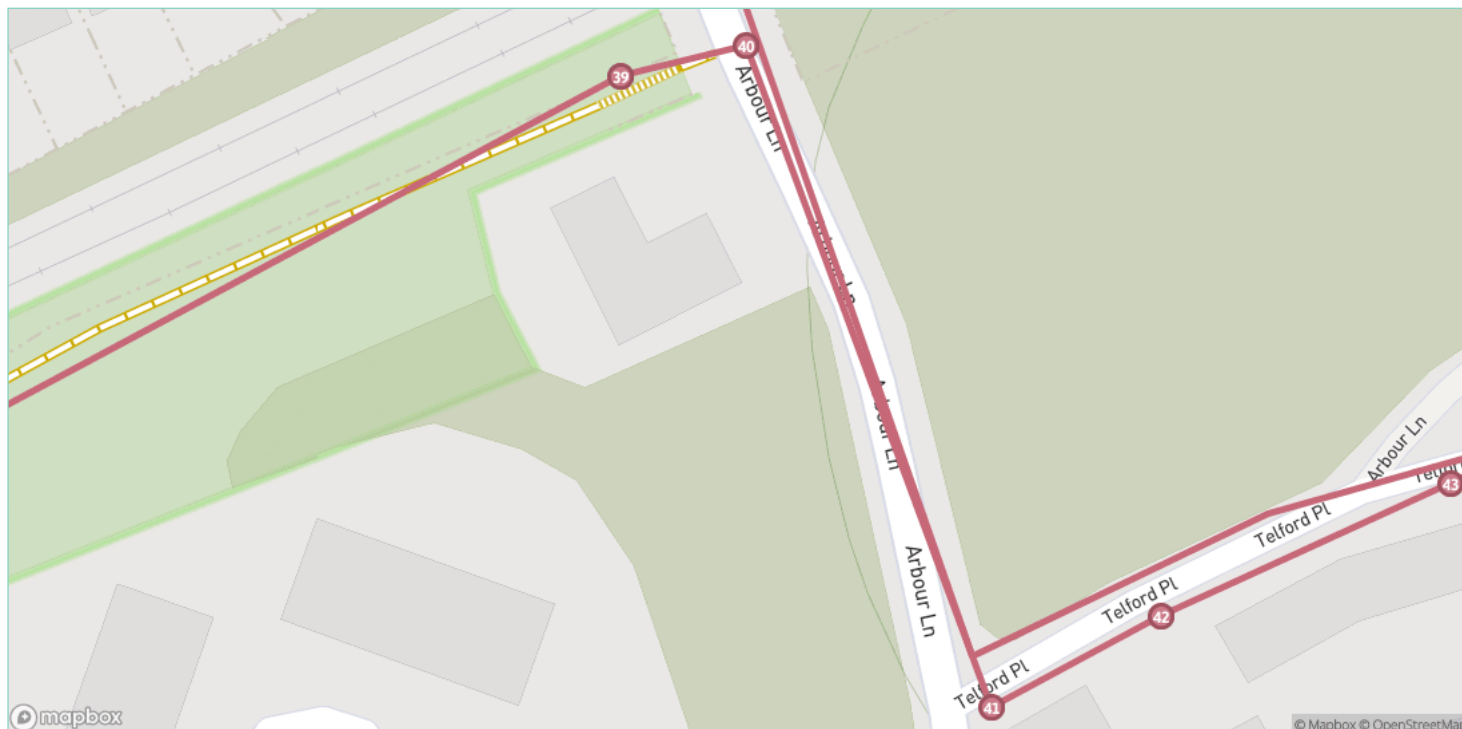
Step 34: Turn right to use the next footbridge. Note there's about 12 steps up and back down again on the other side.

Step 35: On the other side of the bridge, go straight through the first trail intersection by the interpretation board.

Step 36: Follow the path as it heads left and then go straight ahead at the next path junction.

Step 37: Continue straight on as you approach the railway line.

Step 38: Follow the path as it turns right to follow alongside the train tracks.



Step 39: Go up the 11 steps to Arbour Lane.

Step 40: Carefully cross the road when it's clear and turn right on the other side.

Step 41: Turn left onto Telford Place.

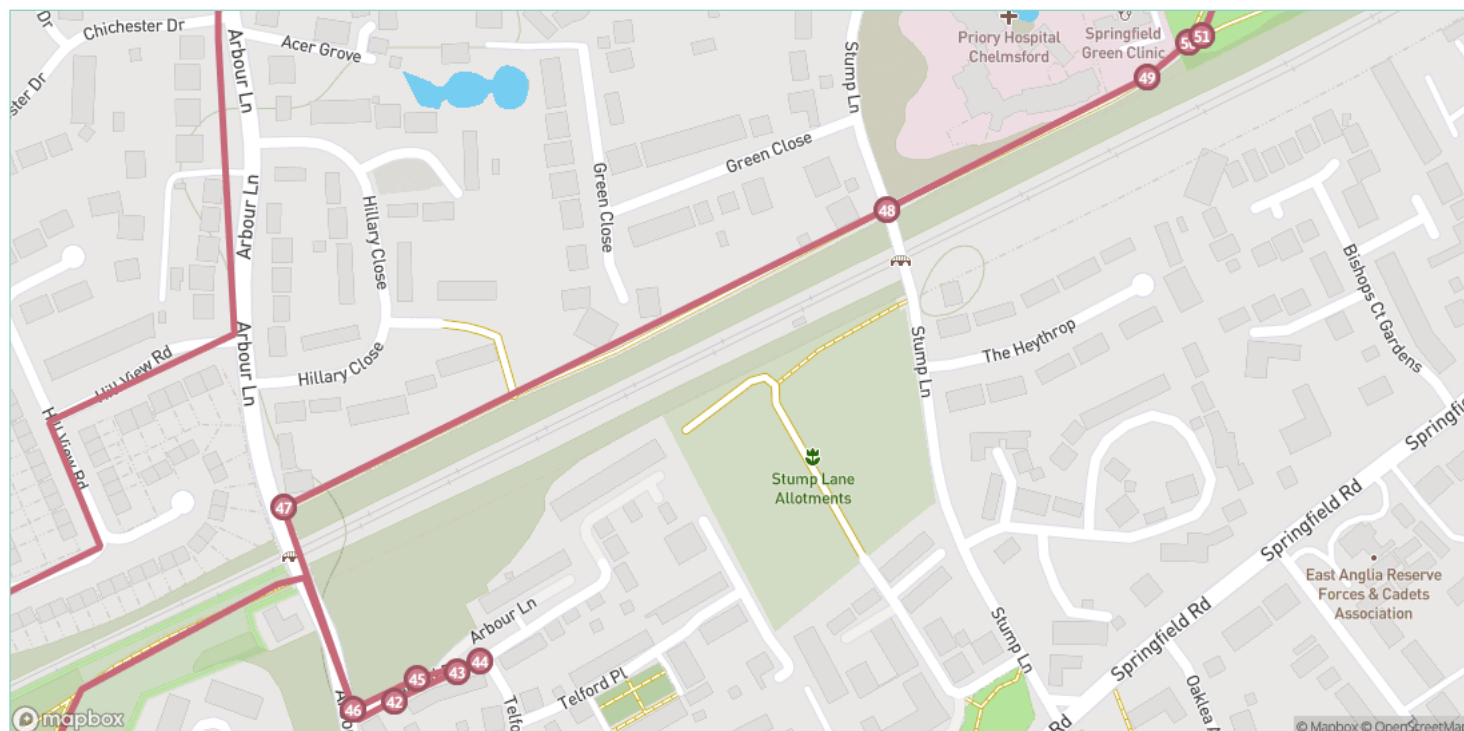
Step 42: On the wall to the right here you can see the MWTC logo - the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company.

Life as a Marconi Apprentice

Life as an apprentice was as much about hard work as it was about meeting new people and having fun. Thousands of apprentices passed through Arbour Lane Training College, as well as training facilities at the main New Street site in Chelmsford.



A group at the Marconi School of Wireless Communication, Arbour Lane



Step 43: These new houses are on the site of the Telford Lodge Residential Annexe of Marconi College.

Apprentices would learn basic skills such as turning, welding, and draftsmanship, and try out every division of the Marconi Company. They would both attend college and complete practical work in different departments.

Step 44: The round stone finials on the road to your right led to the main Marconi College Technical Block buildings.

Step 45: When you're ready, return the way you came towards Arbour Lane.

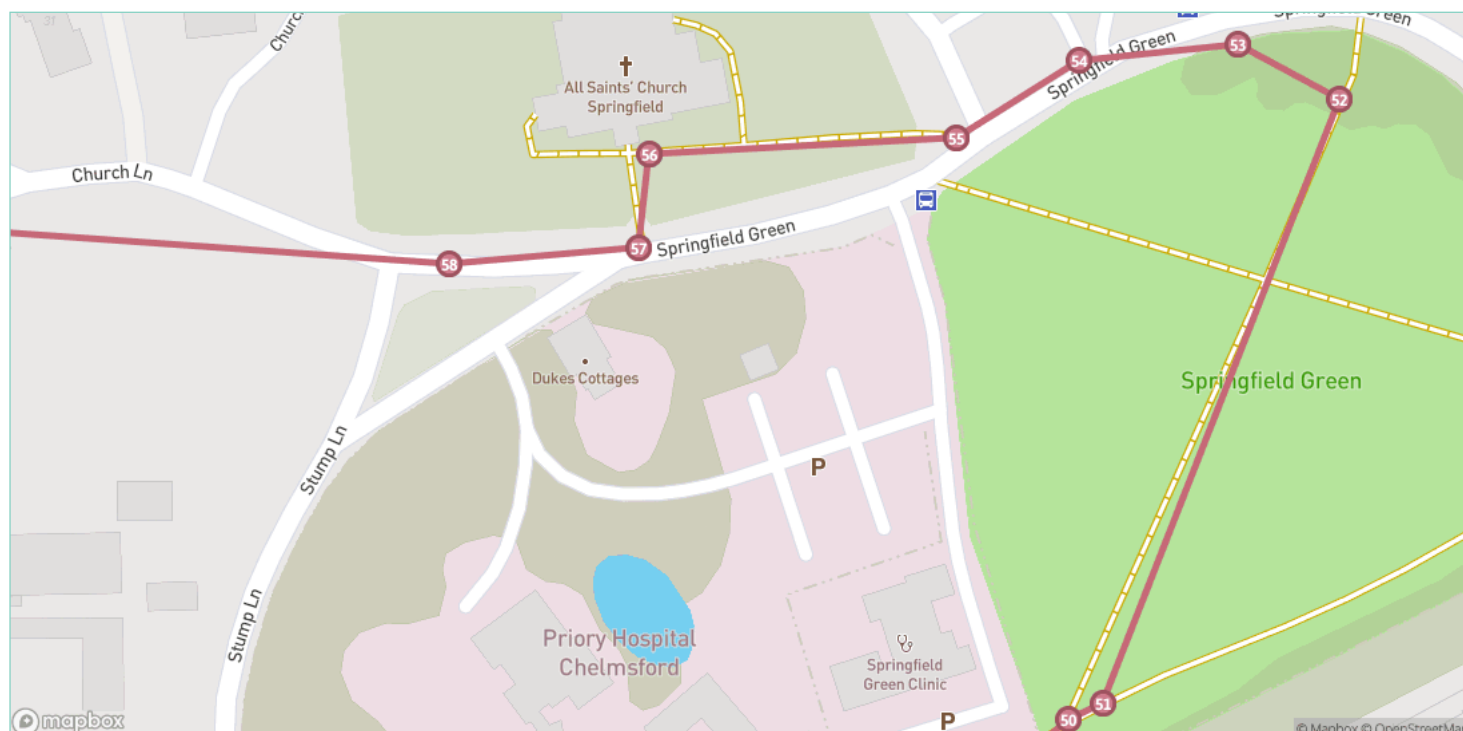
Step 46: Turn right on Arbour Lane to follow the pavement.

Step 47: Just after crossing over the railway line, turn right onto the shared-use path.

Step 48: Carefully cross the quiet Stump Lane and continue straight on through the barriers. We're close to Springfield Green.

Step 49: After the hospital buildings to your left you'll see Springfield Green emerging through the trees! 🌳

Step 50: The path might be hard to see but walk diagonally across the green on the grassy path.



Step 51: If you're walking during wetter seasons, it might be very muddy. If you'd like, you can instead continue straight ahead to walk along the paved path. If so, turn left when you get to the road at the other end of the green.

Step 52: Walk past the wooden markers on the other side of the green.

Step 53: Turn left to follow the grassy verge along Springfield Green road, with the green to your left.

Step 54: Cross the road when it's clear and on your right you'll see the grand building of Springfield Place.

Springfield Place

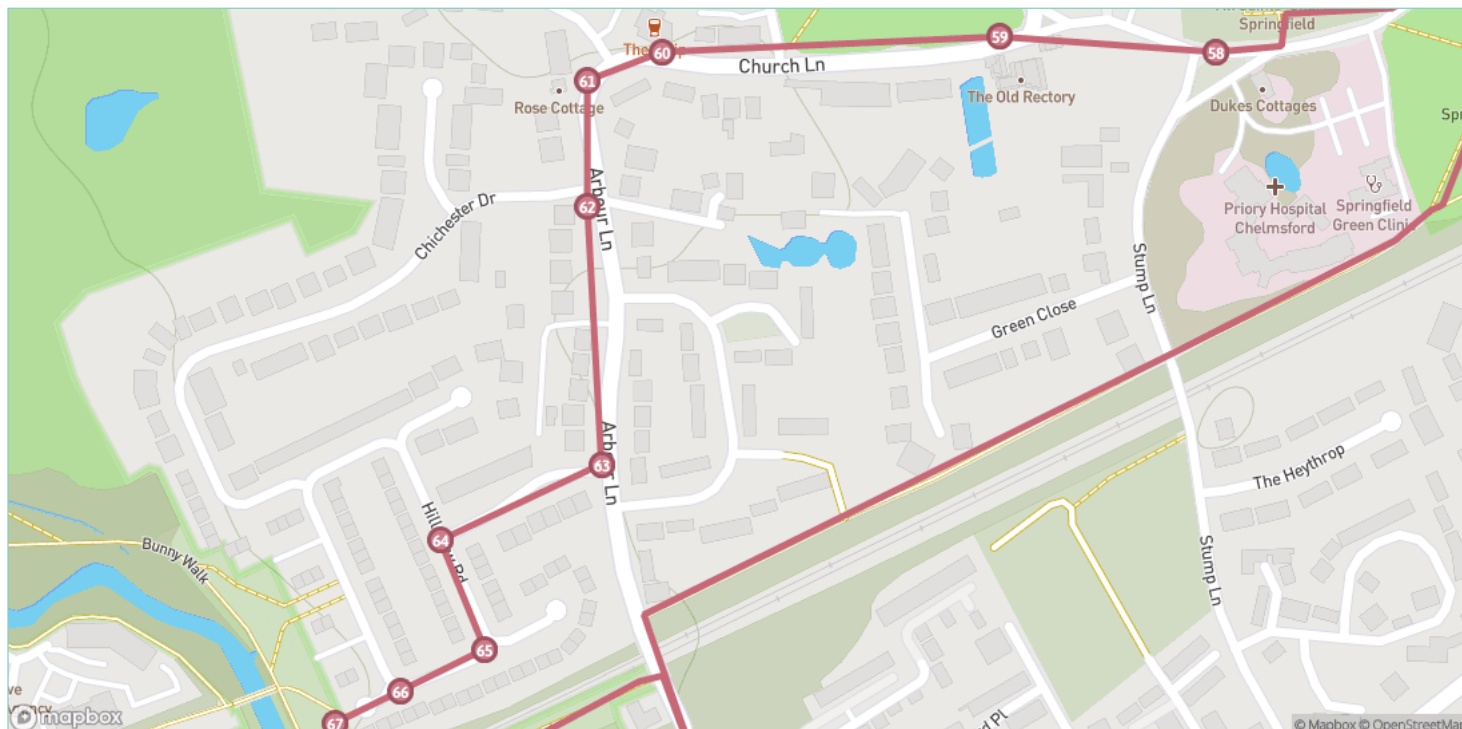
Young people travelled to Chelmsford from across the country to train on the famous Marconi apprenticeship scheme. In Springfield Place there was a Marconi 'hostel', where apprentices that weren't able to commute from home lived in their first year of studying.

Step 55: On your right, enter the churchyard of All Saints' Church, dating back more than 1,000 years.

Step 56: The tower was rebuilt in 1586 after it partially collapsed. Turn left to follow the path back to the road.

Step 57: Exit through the church gate and turn right to follow the pavement.

Step 58: Continue straight as the road becomes Church Lane.



Step 59: Look out for the lovely Pollards Meadow on your right.

Step 60: The Tulip is a great local pub to stop in for a rest and refreshments if you'd like a mid-jant break.

Step 61: When you're ready, continue following the pavement as the road bends to the left.

Step 62: Continue ahead, now on Arbour Lane.

Step 63: Turn right onto Hill View Road, a quiet residential street.

Step 64: Then take the first left.

Step 65: Followed by a right at the T junction.

Step 66: Walk straight ahead towards the gate and barriers.



Step 67: Now we're back at the river. Follow the path as it bends around to the left and ducks under the railway viaduct.

Step 74: Cross over Victoria Road again, using the pedestrian crossing as earlier in the walk.

Step 68: Head under the bridge.

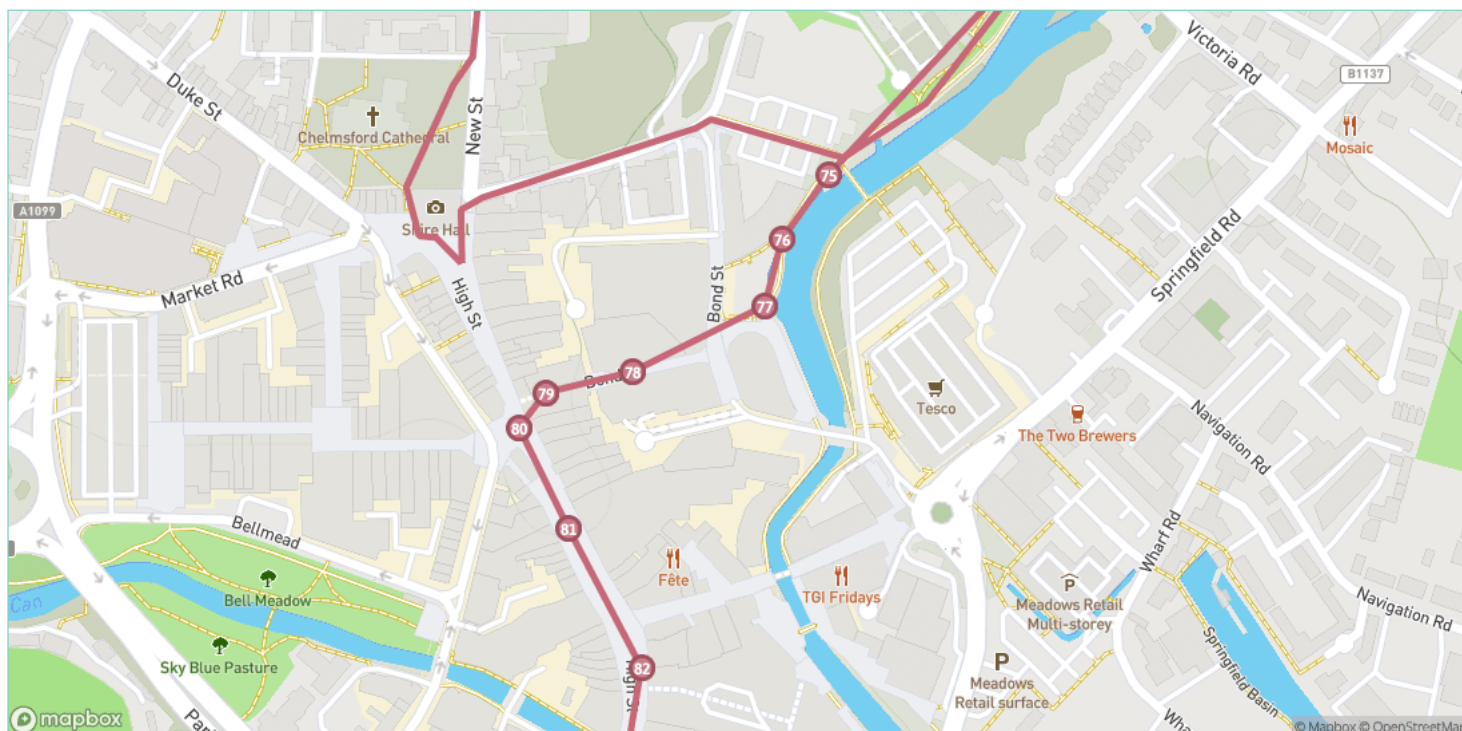
Step 69: If you're walking from May to September, look out for wildflowers in this meadow, planted to help support local wildlife.

Step 70: Continue straight on past the footbridge you crossed earlier.

Step 71: Continue on the tarmac path.

Step 72: Turn right to cross the river at the next footbridge. This one is step-free.

Step 73: Once on the other side, the path should look familiar. Turn left and begin retracing your steps back towards town.



Step 75: You came from the right earlier, but stay straight to continue along the river after the footbridge.

Step 82: When you're ready, continue along the High Street as it bends around to the right.

Step 76: Bear slightly left to continue riverside as the river meanders to the left.

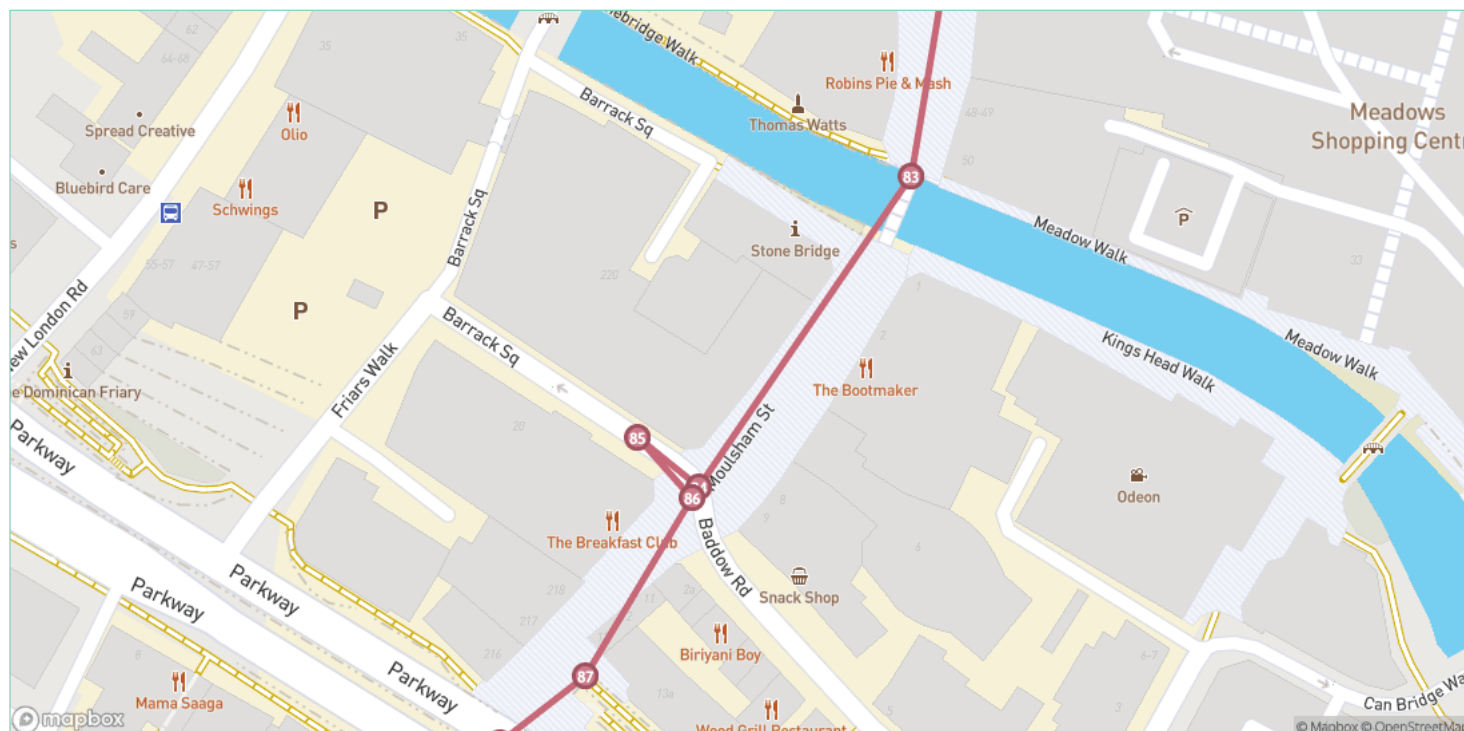
Step 77: Veer right to walk down the central lane, past the John Lewis.

Step 78: You're on Bond Street now and you're headed towards the archway ahead.

Step 79: Pass underneath the archway and turn left.

Step 80: You're now on the pedestrianised High Street.

Step 81: There's a market here every Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday. There are lots of places to grab a bite to eat, shop and linger.



Step 83: Cross the gorgeous stone bridge over the River Can. It opened in 1788 and has been here ever since. Head straight once on the other side.

Step 85: The shop windows along Barrack Square are filled with reproduction images from the period when Marconi began works in the town.

Marconi and the Titanic

Marconi technology was used around the world and it was even a Marconi radio that saved hundreds of lives on board the RMS Titanic in 1912. For many years, Marconi's was an industry leader in the world of radar which meant that it took up government contracts and its technology was used in the army, navy, and RAF.

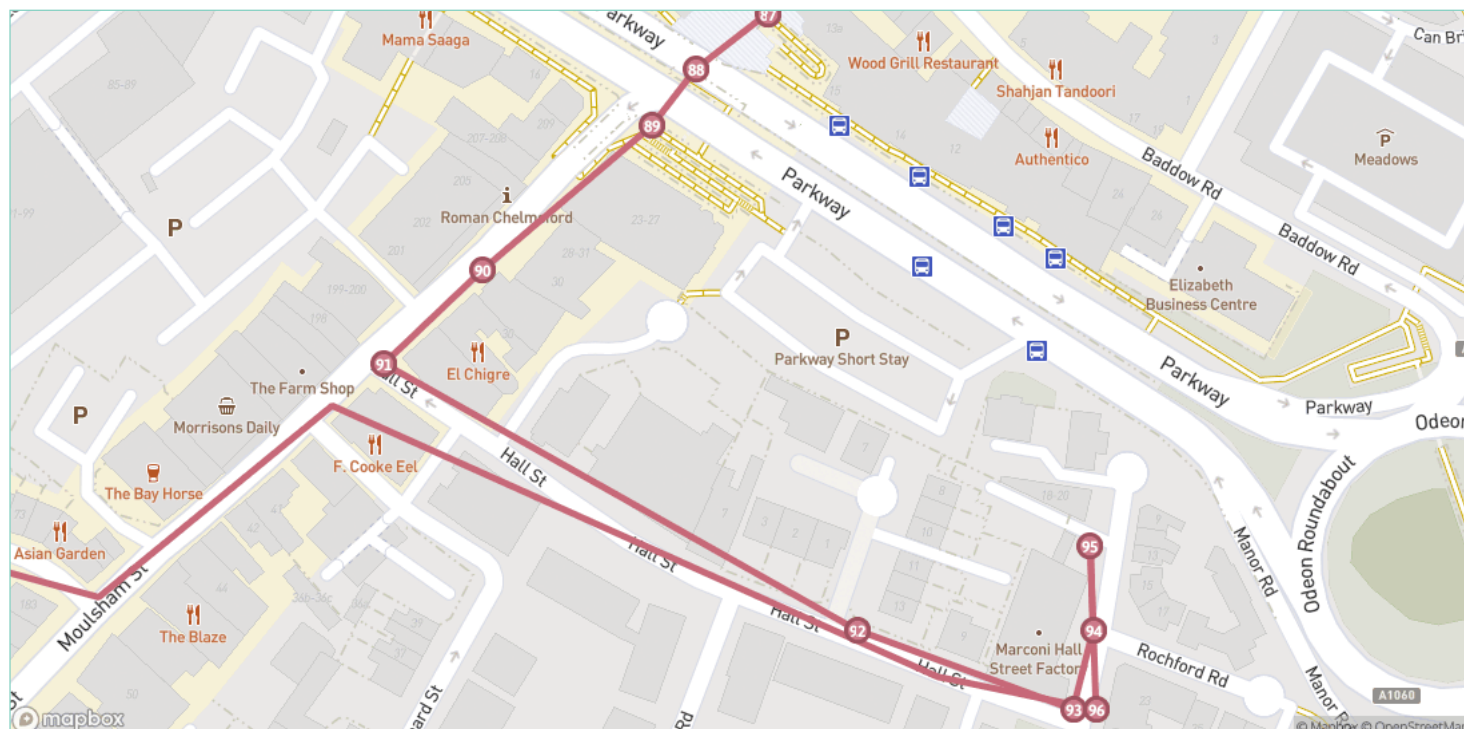
Step 84: Take a brief detour off Moulsham Street by taking the right into Barrack Square.

Marconi and the Titanic

On board the Titanic, there was a radio room containing all of the technology needed to communicate with other vessels and transmitters back home. There were 2 radio operators on board, who were employed and trained by Marconi but formed part of the ship's crew. Jack Phillips, aged 25, was the Senior Wireless Operator and Harold Bride, aged 22, was the Junior Wireless Operator. Bride survived, and helped report survivor lists with the ship that rescued Titanic survivors, RMS Carpathia. Phillips died in the sinking.

Step 86: Head back to Moulsham Street once you've explored the windows.

Step 87: Continue on Moulsham Street towards the A road. You can cross the dual carriageway using the underpass which you'll find to your left.



Step 88: Or you can continue ahead to use the pedestrian crossing at the lights.

Step 89: Continue straight ahead on Moulsham Street once you're on the other side of the crossing.

Step 90: There are lots of places to grab a bite to eat and rest before continuing on.

Step 91: Turn left onto Hall Street and walk along the pavement.

Step 92: After Alfred Mews you'll see another sign of Marconi's influence here - a plaque with a receiver picture on it. 

Step 93: At the junction with Mildmay Road is the star of the show! The historic frontage of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company building.

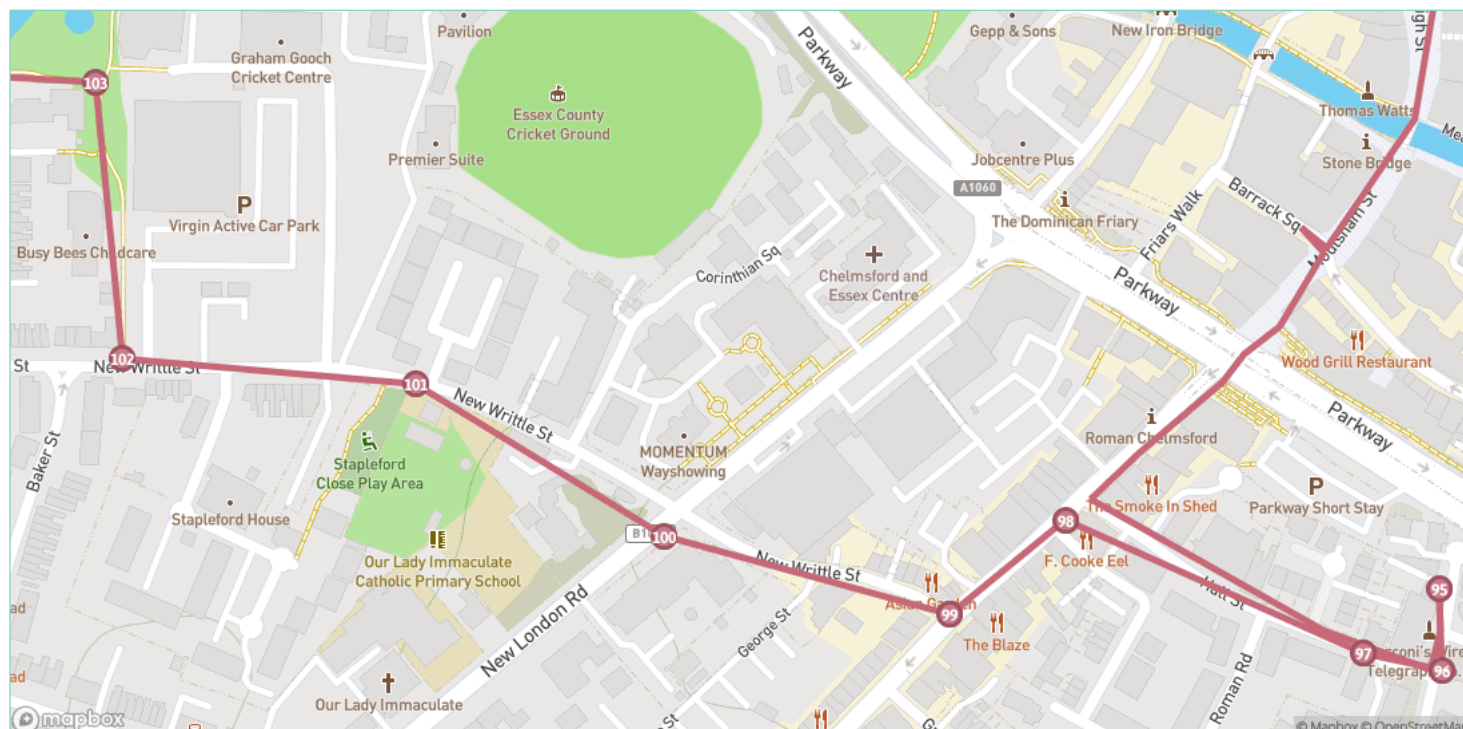
Step 94: Head left onto Mildmay Road to find the blue plaque.

The First Wireless Factory

In 1905, the factory was temporarily closed as work was moved to a factory in Dalston, north London. However, in 1908 work was moved back to Hall Street and the Company began to grow. This was also the site of the School of Wireless Communications from 1904 until 1911.



Step 95: There's another logo around the other side of the building if you continue a bit further along Mildmay.



Step 96: There's another information board with some more historic facts on The Woolpack pub opposite.

Step 103: Turn left after the flats to your left to stay on the shared use path on this side of the river.

Step 97: When you're ready, return down Hall Street the way you came.

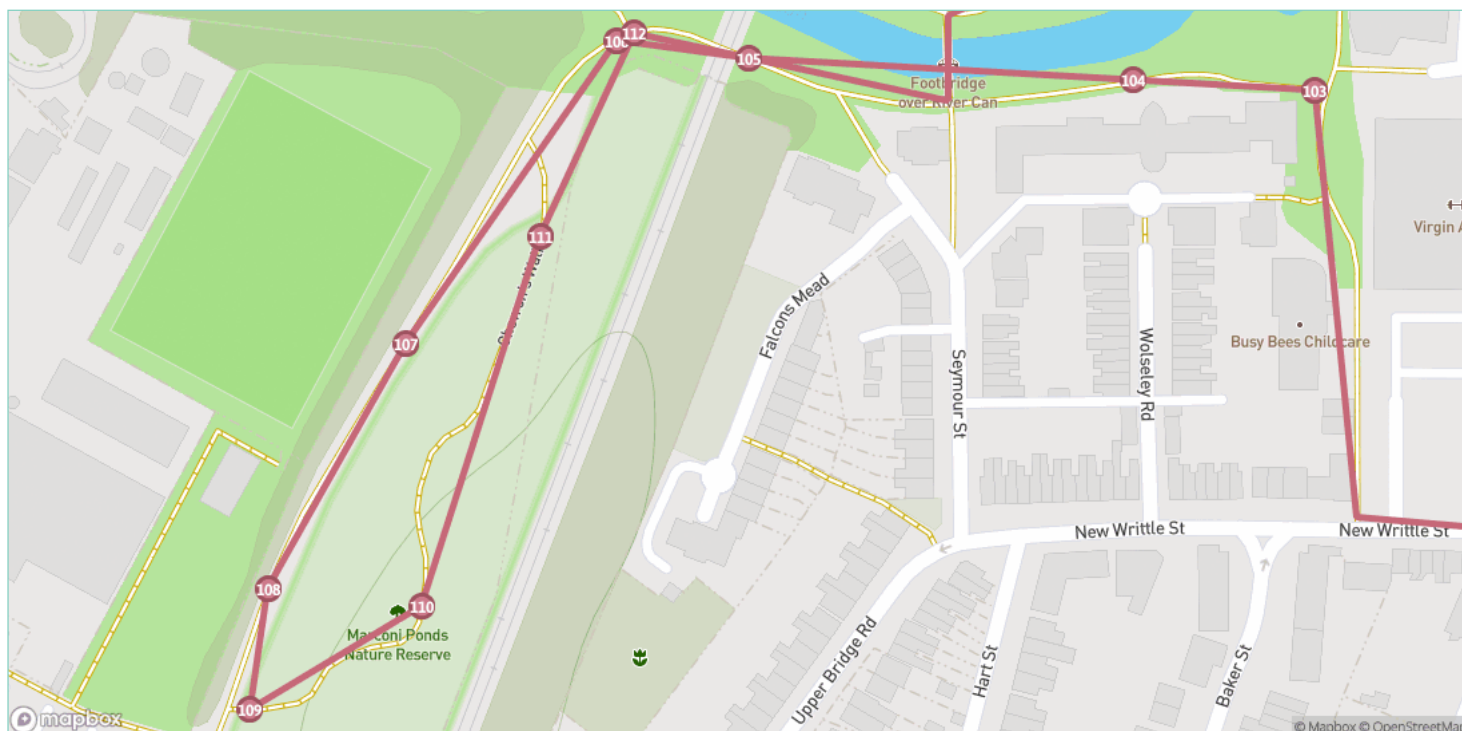
Step 98: Turn left, back onto Moulsham Street.

Step 99: Cross when it's clear and turn right to follow New Writtle Street.

Step 100: Use the pedestrian crossing to your left at London Road, and then continue straight along New Writtle Street on the other side.

Step 101: Stick to the pavement as the road bends to the left.

Step 102: Turn right after The Meades into the shared use path.



Step 104: Try to be mindful of other travellers along here and walk in the designated areas.

Step 105: Pass under the gorgeous railway viaduct. From the 1840s a goods tramway run under here connecting clay pits to brickworks by the river.

Step 106: Stay left to enter Marconi Ponds Nature Reserve, a lovely green oasis. We'll show you one loop through but you're welcome to explore too.

Step 107: Follow the tarmac path through the trees 🌳🌳🌳.

Step 108: On your right is the Teledyne e2v building.

Step 109: Turn left onto the wooded path. To your right are the Marconi Ponds. They're usually fenced off.

Step 110: Stick to the path or try your luck at the balance beams.

The Marconi Social Club

Marconi employees didn't just spend their days at work with their colleagues. The Company allowed, and even encouraged, colleagues to spend time together through social and recreational activities outside of work.

Step 111: At the end of the path, turn right to retrace your steps on the tarmac path back towards the railway viaduct.

The Marconi Social Club

A lot of this took place at the Marconi Social Club which had a number of locations, including near the New Street site and on Beehive Lane in Great Baddow. There were plenty of sports and social clubs that employees could join, and families were welcome at social events.



Step 112: When the tracks were built in 1843, it was one of the first steam railway lines anywhere in the world.

Step 113: Turn left to cross the stone footbridge over the River Can.

Step 114: On the other side of the bridge, turn right (towards Town Centre). You're now in Central Park.

Step 115: The Central Park Café is open every day, 8am to 4pm. To get to it, take your first left and walk towards the lake. You'll see the cafe building straight ahead to your left.

Step 116: Otherwise, continue straight ahead on the shared use path through the park.

Wartime in Chelmsford

The Second World War took place from 1939 until 1945. Chelmsford was an important target for German planes in air strikes because of the importance of industry in the town. Like many other British companies, Marconi's turned their attention to helping the war effort. The Radar division, located at Great Baddow, produced new technology for aeroplanes in the Royal Air Force which helped Britain and the Allied Forces defeat Nazi Germany.

Step 117: At the path intersection with the little roundabout feature, take the path on the left.



Step 118: There is a sign by the roundabout feature which marks Route 1 of the National Cycle Network, which connects Dover to Inverness!

Wartime in Chelmsford

Marconi Research Laboratories at Great Baddow covered with camouflage. 1939

New technology was so important in wartime that it was crucial that Marconi factories didn't get bombed. Buildings at Great Baddow and the New Street site in Chelmsford were covered with dark, camouflage colours so that they couldn't be seen from the air.



The New Street Works, painted with camouflage patterns



Marconi Research Laboratories at Great Baddow covered with camouflage, 1939

Step 119: You'll be walking alongside the lake. Don't forget to take in the views along the way



Wartime in Chelmsford

These tactics worked as neither site was destroyed, although the Hoffmann's factory was bombed in 1944 and 30 people lost their lives.



Step 120: Head straight on towards the subway decorated nicely with flower graffiti art. 🌸

Step 121: Head under and then turn left on the other side of the underpass, following the flowers.

Step 122: Continue straight to pass under the viaduct one more time. Turn right immediately after. Follow the pavement along Viaduct Road.

Step 123: Turn left after the car park to walk through Marconi Plaza beside the large red brick building.

Step 124: Our final tour stop is Marconi Square, home to the stunning statue of Marconi himself, by Stephen Hicklin.

The Legacy of Marconi

The Marconi Company was brought to life by Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian inventor who had been interested in science and engineering from a young age. The British government granted him permission to set up a factory in the UK, and so Chelmsford was chosen as the prime location for the world's first wireless factory.



Step 125: Turn right after the statue into Fairfield Road. Follow the pavement towards the white buildings straight ahead.

The Legacy of Marconi

The statue was created by sculptor Stephen Hicklin, and represents the impact of the Company on global communication. The statue was unveiled on this site in 2008, it was previously on display in the lobby of Essex Record Office!



Marconi technology used in an early speed camera

Step 126: Turn right onto Duke Street.

The Legacy of Marconi

The legacy of the Marconi Company in Chelmsford is huge. The 3 main companies in Chelmsford were Marconi's, Hoffmann's and Crompton's, and were the biggest employers in the local area. Local industry was booming well into the second half of the twentieth century – so next time you're speaking to someone from Chelmsford, ask if they have a connection to the Marconi Company!

Step 127: If you're taking the bus home, the central bus station is just before the rail station along Duke Street here.

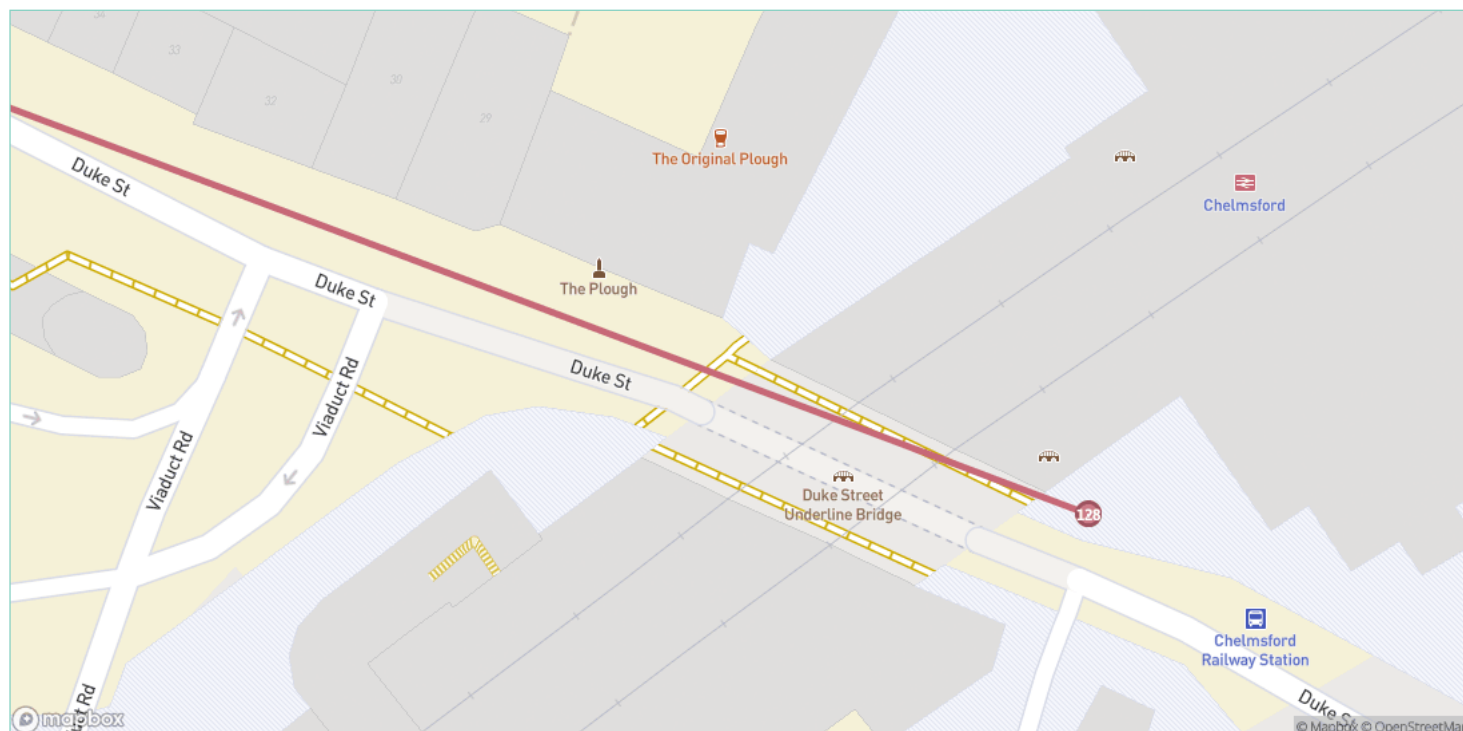


ESSEX RECORD OFFICE



Essex County Council

Thank you for coming with us on this walk around Chelmsford! You can find out more about the Marconi Company and listen to the full interviews at Essex Record Office.



Step 128: A short while later you'll have made it back to the train station after a lovely exploration of Chelmsford's history.



This walk is part of 'Communicating Connections', an oral history project run by Essex Record Office and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Part of Essex 2020.

