



Farringdon, Chawton, Jane Austen's House *Walk and Walkability*

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles

easy walking

Region: Hampshire

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Refreshments: Farringdon, Upper Farringdon, Chawton

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Map: Explorer 133 (Petersfield) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Villages, literary connections, sheep meadows, church, Victorian folly

In Brief

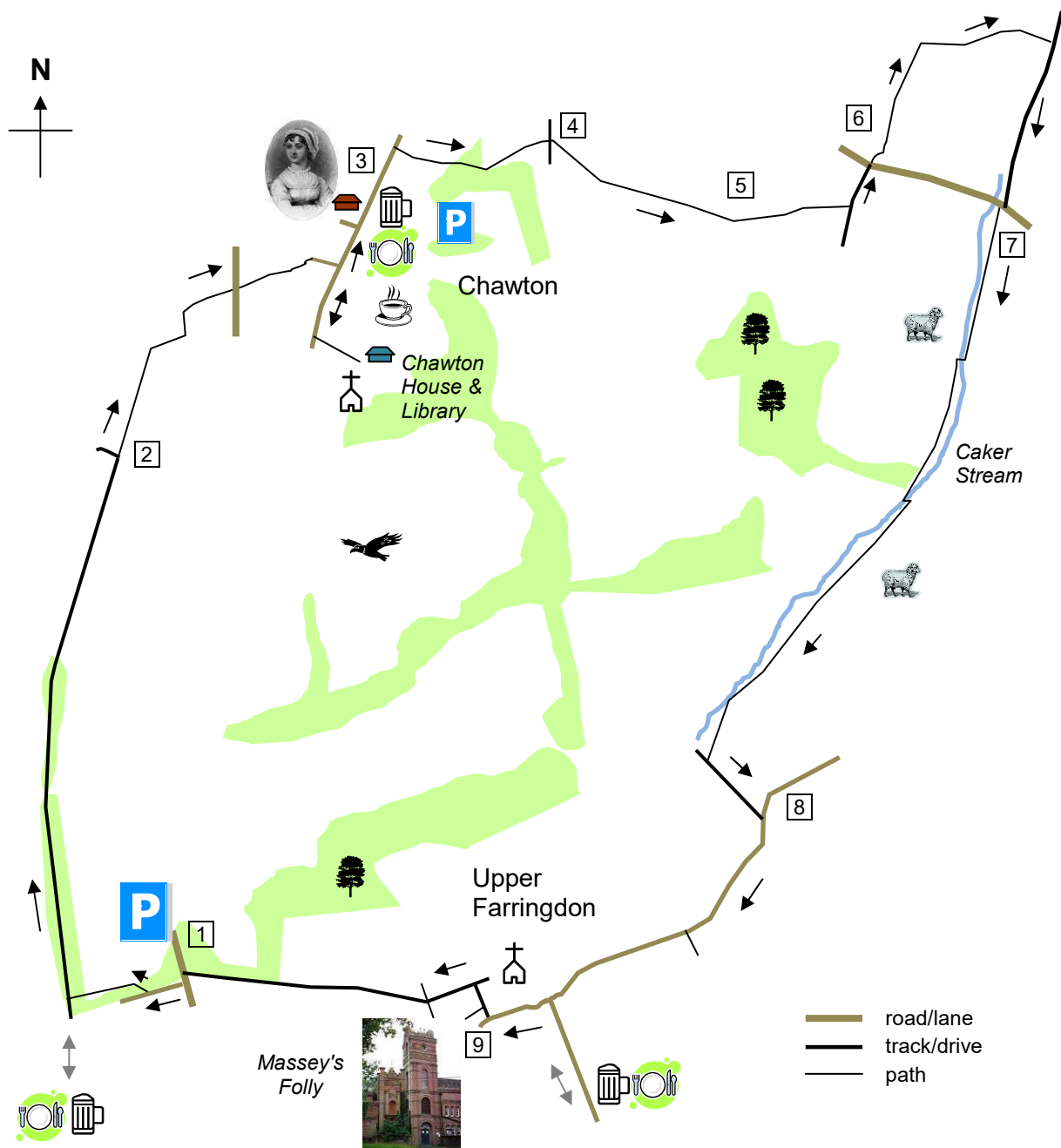
It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a good walk in country air will do wonders for the mind and the body in equal measure. This walk visits the village where Jane Austen lived during her last eight years, giving you a chance to see her house, now converted into a museum, for a small entrance fee. En route you go through wonderfully long green meadows next to the Caker stream to pass through another village that Jane knew well, with several surprises.



There are no nettles on this walk. Boots are recommended but good shoes are adequate in dry conditions. A small-to-medium dog could come if he can manage the stiles but there are a large number of sheep in the fields.

The walk begins in the car park beside the A32 road just north of the village of Farringdon, Hampshire, **postcode GU34 3DH**. The car park is marked with a "P" sign but looks rather like a layby. [2019: it's being resurfaced (specially for us?) but there is still room.] Alternatively, you could park in Chawton, postcode **GU34 1SD**, preferably away from the museum, nearer Chawton House and Library. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk



- 1** The start was slightly changed in 2019 to avoid the untidy yard. Beginning at the car park just north of Farringdon on the A32, walk just 10m with the road on your left and turn **right** on a narrow tarmac lane. In 50m, you pass a private left fork leading to a wooden gate. 10m later, fork **right** on a path across the woodland and veer **left** along the edge of a crop field. At the far end, turn **right** on a wide path. *This is the disused railway, part of the old Meon Valley Railway and you are near what was the "Farringdon Halt". (See also the "River Meon and Villages" walk in this series.)* Follow this easy wide path, with trees and fields on each side, soon going over a crossing path by a hidden fingerpost near farm a building and later going under a railway arch (*note the pink fox*). At the end of the path, where it loops round to your left, keep ahead at a fingerpost along a grassy strip between fields.

- 2 When your path reaches a hedge and marker post, veer **right** as directed, then shortly **left** through trees at another post. At the next post, your path turns **right** beside a field. *Note that you are on part of St Swithun's Way, a long-distance path running from Winchester to Farnham.* This narrow path between hedges takes you through a modern kissing gate and down steps to a road, the A32 again. Cross it carefully, go up steps, over a stile and along a path between wire fences. At the end go through a wooden gate and continue along a residential road to a T-junction in the village of Chawton. Your route is **left** along the road. However, it is worth a small diversion by turning right for a short distance to the entrance to Chawton House and Library (alternative parking spot on roadside).



Chawton House is an Elizabethan manor house built by John Knight who required all his heirs to keep the surname "Knight". So when Jane Austen's brother Edward inherited the house he was obliged to change his surname. The house now contains the Chawton House Library, a collection of books and original manuscripts by women writers, including Jane of course, run in partnership with Southampton University. You can visit the house and library and walled garden at 2.30, for a fee, mainly on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Church of St Nicholas is next door. It contains numerous memorials of interest to students of Jane Austen and, outside, the graves of her mother and sister.

Having turned left on the road, you soon arrive at a road junction and Jane Austen's House.



Edward bought the cottage for his sister and mother in 1809 and it was here that Jane spent the last eight years of her life, writing Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion. A glimpse of life in a genteel country village such as Chawton can be gleaned from her novels. The cottage is now a museum, showing manuscript letters from Jane and many of her music books with pieces transcribed in her own hand. The museum is open daily (entry fee), except during January.



Chawton was called "Celtone" in medieval times and the first part of the name means either "calves" or "chalk" (both seem appropriate). The village has a pub, the Greyfriar (Fullers) with a comprehensive menu and a tea shop.

- 3 Continue along the road past the *Greyfriar* pub and, just after *Merrivale*, turn **right** on a very narrow signed footpath. Continue through a metal kissing-gate and go straight ahead across the pasture on a narrow path between fences. Your path takes you through a modern kissing-gate, then up a steep bank into woods. At the top, bear **left** into a sheep field. Keep ahead across the pasture, cutting the right-hand corner, passing a farmstead and orchard on your right. A wooden swing-gate takes you onto a shingle drive.
- 4 Cross the drive and go past a redundant stile. Take a path between fences along the left-hand side of a small meadow to go over a stile on the other side. Now continue along the right-hand side of a larger meadow beside a new fence, so that you will be walking along the centre of an even larger meadow). At the other end, keep **left** into another sheep meadow and veer slightly **left** again here, across a pasture, to go over another stile. Now keep your previous direction straight across the next meadow aiming for the last of four large oaks in the hedgerow on your right. Here you will encounter yet another (thankfully avoidable) stile.
- 5 Veer left in the next meadow, cutting the left-hand corner, to a large metal gate. A chain on a nail enables the gate to be opened. Now proceed along the left-hand side of a large sheep pasture. (You may see a guard llama in

one of these fields: it helps to protect sheep against foxes.) At the corner, turn left and right to stay on the edge. You arrive before Whitehouse Farm via a large metal gate. Turn **left** on the farm's concrete drive. Where the drive bends right, leave it to go straight on to a small [Jul 2021: broken] wooden gate and a road, the Selborne Road.

Some walkers turn **right** along the main road for 350m and go **right** over a stile, straight to section [7]. But because of a blind curve and lack of a grass verge all the way, this option is *not recommended*.

- [6] Cross straight over the road, on a rather hidden path up a bank and through a gap. Cross one gravel drive, go through a gap in the fence and immediately turn **left** on the second parallel drive. Keep to the left of some ranch fencing as you pass two modern farm buildings on your right and finally reach a wooden fence. Turn **right** here beside the fence. After going up three steps, keep straight on between farm buildings and a wire fence. Follow the wire fence, soon going along a narrow path between two wire fences and then along the left-hand side of a small grassy meadow. Your path ends at a footbridge across a stream. Go over a stile to a junction of drives. Now turn **right** on a tarmac drive. In 500m, the drive ends at the main Selborne Road. Turn **right** on the road and, in 20m, **left** over a stile.
- [7] This small stile leads you into a long sheep meadow. Follow the left-hand side of the sheep meadow under wires with, on your right, the Caker Stream which runs through Alton. At the far end of the first meadow, signposts direct you **right**, over the stream and **left** over a stile (or through the gate beyond). Stay near the right-hand edge, with the stream now on your left. When you are about 100m from the far end, use a small bridge on your **left** to cross to the other side of the stream. Turn **right** and proceed straight ahead with the stream now on your right until you reach a stile. Go over the stile and continue ahead along the next long meadow. You need to walk the entire length of this long narrow rough pasture, keeping to the left-hand edge. Ahead is the half-wooded Berry Hill, an example of the many wooded hills you have seen during this walk, known locally as "hangers". At the far end, go over a stile and follow a grassy track between a hedge and beeches. At a T-junction, turn **left** on a wide farm track with a field on your left. At the end, turn **right** on quiet Gaston Lane.
- [8] Follow the lane, avoiding a wide footpath on the left, into Upper Farringdon. As you reach a road junction, your route is straight on, but by turning *left* on Crows Lane you reach in 350m one of the best pubs in the neighbourhood, the *Rose and Crown*. This pub re-opened in 2018 after a refurb. Reviews have been consistently good, for the food, the beer and the atmosphere. The pub is in the Good Beer Guide and serves food every lunchtime. There is a garden in the back. You need to retrace your steps back to the road junction afterwards. Continuing along the road in the village, you pass some attractive cottages and, on the right, an entrance to a perfect country church full of interest.



The name of the village of Farringdon means "ferny hill". Lower Farringdon is the part near the road (and the old railway) while Upper Farringdon is the older eastern section where you are now. The Church of All Saints (not always open unfortunately) dates from the 1100s with additions from all centuries. Two wall paintings can be seen inside. Outside in the churchyard are two ancient yews, older than the church. One of the graves shows an image carved into the headstone of a four-poster bed with money bags underneath and a man dragging an old woman out, egged on by the Devil (hard to see in daylight: wait

till nightfall!!). It graphically records the brutal murder and robbery of Mary Windebank in 1758. The curate from 1761 to 1785 was the famous naturalist Gilbert White of Selborne (see the walk “Selborne and the Zig-Zag” in this series). Jane Austen also regularly walked to here to visit friends.

Take the diagonal path to see the church and afterwards exit to the left back to the road in the village centre where an astounding sight awaits you. The huge red-brick building looks like a Victorian college or a railway terminus hotel transplanted into a country village of thatched cottages. This building is known as Massey's Folly (looking a bit run-down in 2019: clearly someone has plans for it).

The Rev. T.H Massey (1857-1919) was rector here for 62 years and built or rebuilt much of the village. He took over and demolished a property called the Stone House and decided to replace it with something that he had been hatching in his mind. And he built ... and rebuilt ... and built. He employed only one bricklayer, doing much of the work himself. He decorated the walls, the corners and niches with fantastic patterned brickwork. The building took 30 years and he died before it was completed. He took the purpose of the building to his grave and it stood empty and unused for 15 years. It was finally put to use as a village hall and is now used by various groups.

- 9 Turn **right** opposite Massey's Folly, beside the churchyard, on a rough track. At a fingerpost, ignore a narrow footpath on the left and continue to a T-junction. Turn **left** here on a wide concrete track, passing farm buildings and a raised grain store. At a crosspaths keep straight ahead. Your path leads between fields and, in 600m, reaches the main A32 road. Cross the road to the car park where the walk began.



For final refreshments, the “Golden Pheasant” pub is another great hostelry, just 300m south along the footway beside the main road, or by car, into the village of Lower Farringdon, serving real ales (including Hogs Back) and some gourmet food, plus cream teas and coffee. It is open all day.

Getting there

By car: Farringdon is accessed from the A31, Farnham to Winchester road. If coming from the east (London or Farnham) continue past signs for Alton and at the roundabout with brown tourist signs for Jane Austen's house, fork left onto the A32 road, signposted *Fareham*. In 2 km=1¼ miles, in trees, immediately after the 30 mph sign, park on the right off-road.

By bus/train: there is a bus service from Alton Station as far as The Butts (not Sunday); then from the roundabout go along Winchester Road, under the A31, to Chawton, about 15 minutes' walking.

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