

Albury and Silent Pool

Distance: 3.6 miles / 5.92km moderate walking, with steep climb to North Downs Path. Total ascent 465 ft / 142m

In Pursuit of Spring: Chapter 2 The start: London to Guildford

Refreshments: The Drummond in Albury

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford and Farnham)

Getting there: Regular buses run from the Friary, Guildford

If driving, Park at Silent Pool car park (GU5 9BW)

Albury village, described by Cobbett in 1822 as *a few houses, with a large house or two near it and set in a beautiful valley, with its hangers, its meadows, its hop-gardens, and its ponds*. It had been moved in 1780 by a new lord of the Albury House Manor, keen to relocate his tenants so he could develop his estate. Its residents were rehoused from around the old church to the hamlet of Weston Street. This process was finalised by Henry Drummond (1786 – 1860) a wealthy banker and MP. Nothing remains of the older houses. Cobbett had ridden through his Albury estate and regarded him as *famed for his kindness towards the labouring classes, who, God knows, have very few friends amongst the rich*.

Harry Roberts, Thomas's neighbour on the hanger at Steep, wrote of his childhood home in Bishop's Lydeard, Somerset: *Our village, like most other villages of that day, was almost self-supporting. Nearly every trade which had to do with the commercial, industrial or personal wants of the inhabitants had its technical practitioner – saddler, butcher, grocer and draper... carpenter, plumber, miller, rate collector, masons, grave digger, baker and confectioner*. In 1913, Albury could match this, Kelly's Directory recording a boot and shoemaker, 2 blacksmiths, publicans, a farm bailiff, a market gardener, nine farmers, two millers (with water- and steam-driven mills), a tailor, draper, two stationers, post office staff, two gardeners, three bakers, a carpenter, undertaker, saddler, land agent (for the Duke of Northumberland of Albury Park), an artist two butchers, a tax collector, coal dealer and a beer retailer.

As Thomas approached it, ... *the Downs were beginning to give me some shelter, and I went on under them, glad of the easier riding. The Tillingbourne here was running closer under the Down, and the river level met the hillside more sharply than before. The road bent above the meadows and showed them flat to the very foot of a steep, brown slope covered with beeches. The sky lightened – lightened too much: St Martha's tower, almost reaching up into the hurrying white track, was dark on its dark hill. So I came to Albury, which has a streamlet between it and the Downs, unlike Abinger Hammer, Gomshall and Shere. The ground, used for vegetables and plum trees, fell steeply down to the water, beyond which it rose again as steeply in a narrow field bounded horizontally by a yet steeper strip of hazel coppice; beyond this again the rise was continued on a broader field extending to the main hillside beech wood*. Silent Pool, and its related and lower Sherbourne Pond, lie in a complex geological context of chalk, Upper Greensand and Gault Clay. It may have originated from an old chalk quarry and been enlarged in 1662 when the latter pool was created. It is fed by a North Downs escarpment spring and the waters have an opalescent character.

1. Cross the A25 dual carriageway to the bordering track and walk east to the nearby A248. Cross this to the path on the far side.

This is Sherbourne Rd leading to Albury, and follows Edward Thomas's route as it runs between the Millennium Avenue lime trees. On the left is the Catholic Apostolic Church, built by Drummond, lord of the manor of Albury, MP and an ardent



The Catholic Apostolic Church



Henry Drummond

New Road is ahead, with the drive to Albury Park running off it to the left.

2. Follow the path down to and across the wooden Tillingbourne bridge.

3. Cross New Rd and continue to the right as the path veers towards the village.

4. Pass Weston House and the old coach house.



Weston House, 1909, Hugh Thompson

evangelical. He was a follower of Edward Irving (1792 – 1834), who led a group which seceded from the Anglican Church, and later created this Gothic Revival edifice. It was built from local materials by craftsmen in its congregation and opened in 1840. It is said that Augustus Welby Pugin (1812 – 1852), key designer of the Houses of Parliament, created its rose window. Church leaders – known as Apostles – held Council Meetings in its chapter house to discern the teachings, liturgies and practices of the church. The Albury sect regarded the church not so much as a parish church but as the lead church of what was to become the universal church. It died out on the death of its last lead member. It is private and is maintained to await the second coming of Christ.

The manor house was refashioned in the 17th century by John and George Evelyn for the Duke of Norfolk, at the same time as the gardens.

Drummond remodelled the house between 1846 – 1850. Pugin gave it a Tudor battlemented façade and ornamental brick chimneys – considered by Pevsner as “some of the worst things Pugin ever did”. The 120-acre Park is a private residential home but visitors are allowed in to see the old Saxon-Norman church of St Peter and Paul, with its wall painting of St Christopher, monumental brass and a plaque to William Oughtred, Wren’s tutor. The decorated mortuary chapel is a Gothic Revival gem, with its gleaming red, blue and gold designed by Pugin, again under Drummond’s patronage.

The reedy waters on the right, part of the 3000-acre Albury Estate, are fed by Silent Pool. Many of the village buildings belong, like the trout-fishing lakes, to the estate.



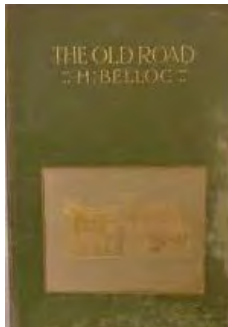
Augustus Welby Pugin

5. Pass the Drummond at Albury.

6. Follow the road round past the stores in the direction of the Guildford/Godalming road.

7. Cross the road as it turns left and go up Water Lane which is signed as a No Through Road.

8. As the route climbs and after the last cottages, cross the Pilgrims' Way.



Hilaire Belloc (1870 – 1953)

9. Proceed forward as it becomes a sunken lane and pursue it left.

The striking feature of Weston House is the collection of 18 highly-decorated Tudor-style chimneys, all of a piece with Drummond's Pugin redesign of Albury House. At the house 'Not the Old Pharmacy', fronted by its mounting block, are yet more flamboyant chimney stacks.

Off to the left in Church Lane is the 1841 'new' parish church of St Peter and St Paul's Church, with an ornamented Romanesque brick exterior and finely arched interior. Again, this was a Drummond commission, replacing the abandoned old church.

Albury, writes Thomas, *is one of those villages possessing a neglected old church and a brand-new one, built among trees on a gradual rise. But the old one is too much like a shameless unburied corpse.*



St Peter and St Paul's Church



The Drummond

There is a distant view of St Martha's Church on the ridge bearing the Pilgrims' Way.

Thomas was familiar with the Pilgrims' Way. In an August 1905 letter to Gordon Bottomley he wrote, *...instead of writing to you, on Saturday noon I started with Freeman [a Lincoln College friend] (my neighbour) to walk to Canterbury along the Pilgrim's Road. We spent Saturday night sleeping & trying to sleep in the fields, sheltered by corn sheaves. It was good. But this morning I had to turn back after going 25 miles because my feet were no use...*

In the dedication of his *The Icknield Way* to his old friend Harry Hooton, he speaks of *the Pilgrim's Way*

10. Carry on upwards to the A25, the Shere Road and Newlands Corner.

11. Cross the A25 and follow North Downs Way eastwards from Newlands Corner.

12. At the four-way signpost at The Boxwood go right downhill to Silent Pool.

13. Take the path on the right over the not-so-silent sluice, cross the lane and follow the track back to the car park.

from Winchester to Canterbury that you and I walked on many a time. In *The Old Road* (1904), which Thomas twice reviewed, the author Hilaire Belloc describes the conjectured route of the ancient trackway running along the North Downs to Dover, acknowledging that parts of this was also used as a Pilgrim path. This section he describes as *a wretched and difficult sunken lane to the north of Weston Wood. We entered this neglected and marshy way. It was a place of close, dark, and various trees, full of a damp air, and gloomy with standing water in the ruts: the whole an accident differing in tone from all that we knew of the road, before and after.* The metalled road becomes a broken track.

Off to the left is the old Albury Down chalk pit, used to quarry material for pre-tarmac road surfaces. A lime-burning kiln stood within it, lime being created from the incinerated chalk to spread over the sticky clay fields and make them easier for ploughing.

There are public toilets in the car park and, nearby, a seat for fine views south of tree-covered sandstone ridges and, on a clear day, the South Downs.

This is an old drove road and the Scots pines may be connected as former way markers. Oak and silver birch dominate. Ignore the permissive path going off right.

This path is along an eroded avenue lined with yew trees. Explore the pools off to the left with their jade-green waters. *... I went to see the Silent Pool. Until it has been seen, everything is in the name. I had supposed it circular, tenebrous, and deep enough to be the receptacle of innumerable romantic skeletons. It is, in fact, an oblong pond the size of a swimming bath, overhung on its two long sides and its far, short side by ash trees. Its unrippled lymph, on an irregular chalk bottom of a singular pallid green, was so clear and thin that it seemed not to be water. It concealed nothing. A few trout glided here and there over the chalk or the dark-green weed tufts. It had no need of romantic truth or fiction. Its innocent lucidity fascinated me.*



Silent Pool, BM

Special thanks to Barbara Kinnes, Edward Thomas Fellowship
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