

## Froyle and Holybourne

**Distance: 7 miles / 11.25 km, moderate walking**

***In Pursuit of Spring*: Chapter 3 Guildford to Dunbridge**

**Refreshments: The Hen and Chicken Inn (01420 22115), Upper Froyle, Alton GU34 4JH**

**The White Hart (01420 87654), 139 London Rd, Holybourne GU34 4EY**

**West End Flower Farm (01420 767 306), Upper Froyle, Alton GU34 4JG**

**Map: Explorer 144 (Basingstoke, Alton Whitchurch)**

**The route can be muddy at near a footbridge. Appropriate footwear recommended.**

**Getting there: At the Hen and Chicken Inn (01420 22115), Upper Froyle, Alton GU34 4JH, turn to drive into Upper Froyle. Drive forward to the junction with a small green on left. Go left passing industrial buildings as far as Rawles Motorsports. Opposite this and on the left is a telegraph pole with clear space at the base; it is frequently used as a parking spot by walkers.**

**From Thurs – Sat, refreshment and toilet access can be found at West End Flower Farm (01420 767 306) Upper Froyle, Alton GU34 4JG. To access this, walk to the gate beyond the parking space, and, almost immediately, turn into the gate on the left and walk down to the farm.**

Froyle is divided as Upper and Lower Froyle. This split village lies below the rolling chalk downland in the Wey Valley which traveller Arthur Young (1741 – 1820) described as the fairest 10 miles in England. It has yielded tools from both Palaeolithic and Bronze Ages and there is evidence of Roman settlement nearby. Its Saxon name Froehyll means 'the hill of the goddess Freya'. The manor having belonged to the Confessor, it is mentioned in Domesday as 'Froli'. It is on the Pilgrim's Way and is thought to be a winter route, lying above the damp lower route. Its wealth derived from corn, sheep and hops.



Frontage of Froyle Park, Edward Thomas, Fieldwork Book 58, Berg Library

Thomas records in his 1912 Fieldwork Book: *the many-gabled pale walls of Froyle Ho[use] adjoining the old square] ch[urch] tower am[on]g elms & many small flames of cypress just by coombe? Of the chiffchaff [heavily underlined] of M[ar]ch 22 : by the streamlet is old stone stile in park wall [diagram of steps] & steps from it down ditch side to r[oa]d. l[eft] of r[oa]d lined w[ith] trees (elm, ash), finally beeches w[ith] rookery & the parkland of Froyle Ho with its fine big thorns, oak & elm: touching plough & hops – then more elms & a gateway & avenue of young trees leading fr[om] its walls [diagram on left of this] docks grass dandelion nettle more rookery after an[othe]r stretch of wall & beech w[ith]out nests*  
 This became the basis for his description of Froyle in *In Pursuit*.

1. Walk up to the peardrop-shaped green and the Give Way sign. Carry forward into Upper Froyle. Note the White House on the left and then St Joseph's with its statue.



St Joseph

The **White House** and its lawns of Froyle House (built c 1820) lie off to the left.

The last lord of the manor, Sir Hubert Miller (1858 – 1940), was a devoted follower of the High Church Oxford Movement and his devotional outlook is evidenced in the frontages of many of the former estate homes which carry the 19 statues he brought back from his continental travels. This has given rise to Froyle being known as 'the village of the saints'. Many of them can be seen as the walk continues through the village.

In Thomas's Fieldwork Book 58 (now in New York's Berg Archive and covering notes from January 1912 to June 1913) he jots: *on r[igh]t. a park of elm & gr[ea]t thorns on grass, & beyond them the many-gabled pale walls of Froyle Ho[use] adjoining the old square] ch[urch] tower am[on]g elms & many small flames of cypress just by coombe.* He notes the song of the chiffchaff and draws a sketch of the house frontage. In *In Pursuit* he expands: *Froyle House, perhaps the chief in this neighbourhood, stood near where the road is highest, and yet closest to the river—a many-gabled pale house next to a red church tower among elms and black-flamed cypresses. Up to the church and house a quarter of a mile of grass mounted, with some isolated ancient thorns and many oaks, which in one spot near the road gathered together into a loose copse. The park itself ran with not too conspicuous or regular a boundary into hop gardens and ploughland.* Kelly's 1913 Directory notes that the owners of the house were served by nine domestics and a governess.

2. Follow the grey stone wall on the right to the entrance of the hotel and wedding venue, Froyle Park and the neighbouring parish church of St Mary and the Assumption.



Church of St Mary and the Assumption

At this point Thomas almost sings in praise of the chiffchaff, one of his favourite birds which he hears when standing by this boundary wall. *Nothing so convinces me, year after year, that Spring has come and cannot be repulsed, though checked it may be, as this least of songs. In the blasting or dripping weather which may ensue, the chiffchaff is probably unheard; but he is not silenced. I heard him on March 19 when I was fifteen, and I believe not a year has passed without my hearing him within a day or two of that date. I always expect him and always hear him.*

*Not all the blackbirds, thrushes, larks, chaffinches, and robins can hide the note. The silence of July and August does not daunt him. I hear him yearly in September, and well into October—the sole Summer*



*voice remaining save in memory. But for the wind I should have heard him yesterday. I went on more cheerfully, as if each note had been the hammering of a tiny nail into Winter's coffin.*



Sir Hubert Miller



St Hubert



St Anthony of Padua

**Froyle Park**, set in 80 acres of parkland, was a royal estate in Saxon times. The current 1620 manor house is built on a pre-Reformation abbey-property and was enlarged in Georgian and Victorian times. In his notes, Thomas made a detailed recording of the house front. The manorial Miller family having died out, in 1953 the site became the Lord Mayor Treloar School. Treloar was Lord Mayor of London and in 1908 built in Alton a hospital and school for children with non-pulmonary tuberculosis. The school moved from here in 1995 and is now based at Holybourne. It is recognised as a beacon for the education and training of disabled young people. The Park is not open for public visiting.



The parish **church of St Mary and the Assumption**, next to the house, dates back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, was largely rebuilt in 1812, though the tower dates from 1722. The church houses many statues and valuable sets of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> priestly vestments, all donated by Miller. The east window carries early 14<sup>th</sup> century glass in its upper section, the larger lower glass being a memorial to Hubert Miller's mother.

3. Continue past the church and its churchyard wall and then to a hedge with a gap with an unsigned footpath to the right. Follow this.

4. **Go over the stile and across the field diagonally to a kissing gate, across a driveway, through an iron kissing gate, continuing in the same direction to a stile. Cross this to the A31.**

5. **TAKE CARE IN CROSSING: walk over to and between the split central barrier and cross to the far side. Go over the stile onto the waymarked footpath.**

6. **Go diagonally right across the field to the end of the wall and follow the old wall and cross the stile at the end of it.**

7. **Follow the curves downhill of the footpath (this is likely to be muddy after rain) to the footbridge over the River Wey.**

8. **Go through the kissing gate and forward to a stile on the right of a gate.**

9. **Follow through a gate and tunnel under the railway embankment.**

10. **Moving on to the field ahead, walk up, under the pylons, to a farm track that lies to the left of the low ridge above the field.**

11. **At the lane, walk right; note fine view of the ridge to the right.**

12. **Mill Court will be on the right. Take the footpath to the left, opposite the boundary wall of this estate.**

13. **Follow the path under the pylons again and over the road, the forward route being signed by a fingerpost.**

‘Here is a river with fine meadows on each side of it, and with rising grounds on each outside of the meadows, those grounds having some hop-gardens and some pretty woods.’ (William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* 1822)

The rear of Froyle Court is visible among the trees to the right.

The River Wey is a tributary of the River Thames. Its two branches, one of which rises near Alton in Hampshire and the other in West Sussex to the south of Haslemere, join at Tilford in Surrey. It meets the Thames at Weybridge.

‘The landscape around the village is a rural farmed landscape, with rolling chalk hills and a backdrop of woodlands which feature largely in most of the fine views and provide habitats to many of our rarer species. Tree lined lanes leading into Upper and Lower Froyle greet the visitor entering this historic rural Parish. Froyle sits alone, and not linked to the other villages by roadside housing. Open spaces between the pockets of settlements within in the village make for an uncluttered feel and afford pleasant views over farmland and woodland.

Arable Farming, Forestry and Game birds form the main land use locally. Livestock farming is greatly reduced from former days but sheep and horses are still a feature in the landscape around the village. The soil varies in depth between a few inches in some of the local chalkpits, to a few feet in the valleys. Clay, flint and greensand are common around the village.’

*Froyle Village Design statement 2014*

On the ridge, Holybourne Down or Holybourne Hill opens above the village and, at 738 feet/225 metres, is one of Hampshire’s highest points. It is part of the ridge running east from Alton towards Farnham and Guildford and lies above the Wey which holds Upper Froyle and Holybourne, both points on the Pilgrim Way route which Thomas’s *In Pursuit* journey follows.



14. After Malms House, take the rightwards dogleg to follow the field edge.
15. Just before the lane ahead of Wyck Farm, follow the signed footpath to the right and using the field edge parallel to the road. Again, there are fine views of the ridge over to the right.
16. Where the road turns right, follow the sign ahead to the field on the other side.
17. Yet again, walk under the pylons, passing Stirvill's Copse on the left. Carry on walking ahead (as signed on the left) and cross the field to a copse.
18. Go left over the footbridge and off to the right, following alongside the stream till signposted to the right and along a stretch of green lane.
19. At the lane ahead, walk left and follow it down to Neatham Mill and up to the Alton road.  
  
A few paces off to the left is the White Hart pub, offering refreshment.
20. Cross the road and take the footpath to the left of the Wesleyan Chapel, walking through three gateways and between two houses to the corner of the field.
21. St Swithun's Way, tracking the more ancient Pilgrim Way, moves off to the right, but at this point walk left to Holybourne's Holy Rood Church. Cross over to Howard Lane and enter the



Thomas's narrative continues, *My road now had the close company of the railway, which had crossed the river. The three ran side by side on a strip not more than a quarter of a mile in breadth; but the river, small, and not far from its source, was for the most part invisible behind the railway. Close to the railway bank some gypsies had pitched a tent, betrayed by the scarlet frock of one of the children. But in a moment scarlet abounded. The hounds crossing road and railway in front of me were lost to sight for several minutes before they reappeared on the rising fields towards Binsted Wyck. The riders, nearly all in scarlet, kept coming in for ten minutes or so from all hands, down lanes, over sodden arable land, between hop gardens, past folded sheep. Backwards and forwards galloped the scarlet before the right crossing of the railway was taken. The fox died in obscurity two miles away.*



Neatham Mill on the River Wey

The lost Roman settlement of Vindomis is believed to be at Neatham. Its strategic importance lay in its being at the crossing of important roads: one from Winchester towards London and the other from Chichester to Silchester, a large Roman town to the north of present-day Basingstoke.

Named *Haliborne* in the Domesday Book, the name Holybourne derives from the Old English *Haligburna* which means *sacred stream*. This religious connection owes nothing, therefore, to the later pilgrimage route which passes through. Holybourne lies on the old Winchester-Southampton coach road.

churchyard to visit the church and the pond next to it.



The earlier White Hart pub



Holy Rood Church

Thomas's description shows that the church and its burial ground remains unchanged since he wrote *In Pursuit of Spring*. He writes: *It is a flint and stone one, with a moderately sharp shingled spire that spreads out at the base. On the side away from the main road, that is northward, lies ploughland mixed with copse rising to the horizon, but, nearby, a hop garden, an oast house, a respectable, square ivy-mantled farmhouse possessing a fruit wall, a farmyard occupied by black pigs and a long expanse of corrugated iron, roofing old whitestone sheds and outbuildings. Southward is a chalk-bottomed pond of clear water, containing two willow islets, and bordered, where it touches the road, by chestnuts, a lime and an ivy-strangled spruce fir. This pond is not cut off in any way from the churchyard and all its tombstones...*

Bell no 6 of the church's ring of eight bells is named after Edward Thomas.

Edward Thomas cycled along the line of the Pilgrim's Way from Farnham, through Bentley and Froyle on his way to Alton and the Itchen valley. He writes, *Then I came to Holybourne. It is a village built in a parallelogram formed by a short section of the main road, two greater lengths of parallel byroads, and a crossroad connecting these two... Holybourne Church – Holy Rood – stands at the corner where the short crossroad joins one side of the roads; where it joins the other is the Manor Farm. I turned up by the White Hart and the smithy and chestnut with which the village begins, and found the church.... Holybourne's shrubberies, and the beeches and elms of an overhanging rookery, shadowed and quieted the main road as if it had been private. Moreover, there was still some sun to help dapple the dust with light as well as leaf shadow. Nor was the wind strong, and what there was helped me.*

**22. Return to the St Swithun's Way footpath to take the route back to Upper Froyle. Just before reaching Round Wood, Bonham's Farm lies off to the right.**

St Swithun's Way is a 34-mile rural trail running from Winchester to Farnham, via New Alresford and Alton. Winchester was Swithun's see and the cathedral was a principal place of pilgrimage. It was later outshone by Canterbury after the death of Thomas Becket. The original route is covered by the A31, the traffic of which prevents easy walking. The current St Swithun's Way replaces it and links, via the North Downs Way, to the Pilgrim's Way and Canterbury. The section before Farnham follows the River Wey, and parallels Thomas's *In Pursuit* route from Moor Park Farm east of Farnham to Alton.

**23. As signposted, follow the footpath to the left of the trees and along them to the field. Cross this straight ahead (for the last time, under the pylons). The West End reservoir lies to the right below the path.**

Unlike today, Bonham's lay off the road which has now been superseded by the busy A31, eliminating the possibility of cycling easily along Thomas's 1913 route. He writes of this late 17th Century listed building: *How warm and sweet the sun was can be imagined when I say that it made one music of the horn-blowing [of the nearby hunt], the lambs' bleating, the larks' singing, as I sat looking at Bonham's Farm. This plain old brick house, with fourteen windows – two dormers – symmetrically placed, fronted the road down two or three hundred yards of straight, hedged cart track. It had spruce firs on the left, on the right some beeches and a long barn roof stained by lichens.*

**24. Arriving at the tarmac (the entrance to West End Farm is on the right), return to the start point.**



With thanks to Catherine Carberry, Wendy Britton of the Bristol Ramblers, Janet Bowden; to Nick Denton of the Edward Thomas Fellowship for invaluable help in redesigning the walk

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**8. Froyle and Holybourne**

