

Main walk last checked	Reverse route after lunch checked		
1 February 2025	7 February 2023		
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Overton Circular

North Hampshire hills and Jane Austen's literary landscape

Length: **Main walk:** 18.7km (11.6 miles)

Shorter walk (no pub lunch): 13.8km (8.6 miles)

Toughness: 4 out of 10: gentle hills

Maps: OS Landranger 185, Explorer 144.

Features

This is a walk through gently undulating scenery in the north of Hampshire, passing several quaint churches and a fine country house or two, not to mention **the source of the River Test**. But it also has a big interest for literary fans as it takes you to the place where the writer Jane Austen grew up, and past several places that she would have known.

This is in fact **Jane Austen's literary landscape**. In a letter to a niece, she famously described her novel-writing technique as "getting two or three families together in a country village", and in doing this she was recreating the place she lived for the first 25 years of her life.

On this walk you pass the site of her **childhood home** in the village of Steventon (the actual house was demolished soon after Jane's death by her brother Edward), and you can walk up the lane to the surprisingly small and remote **church** where her father was vicar.

You also pass **Ashe House**, where Jane famously flirted with Tom Lefroy (an event that was used as the basis for the film *Becoming Jane*, which suggested – almost certainly erroneously – that this was Jane's great thwarted love), and **Deane House**, which is typical of the kind of grand house where the Austens would have socialised. Further information about each place and the associations they had for Jane can be found in panels within the main walk directions. All are in the first five miles of the walk (ie up to and including Steventon church).

Walk options

There is a shortcut at Steventon church which reduces the walk length to **13.8km (8.6 miles)**. The only lunch option on this walk is the Palm Brasserie, relatively early in the route - see **Lunch** overleaf.

Transport

Overton is on the line to Salisbury and served by hourly trains out of **Waterloo**, taking just under an hour. Catch a train leaving London **before 10am** to get to The Fox in time for lunch.

Lunch

The **Palm Brasserie** (01256 518 160), 4km (2.5 miles) into the walk, has taken over the site of the former Deangate Inn. It is open 12-3pm and from 5pm Monday to Thursday and all afternoon and evening Friday to Sunday, offering "modern British, European and Asian-inspired flavours".

Otherwise, the lunch stop for this walk is **The Fox** in North Waltham (01256 397 288), 9.8km (6.1 miles) into the walk. This is a popular pub with a large table-service restaurant and a smaller bar area where the full menu is also served. In summer it has an extensive area of outside tables. Food is served from 12pm to 2.30pm and 6pm to 8.30pm Tuesday to Saturday, and from 12pm to 5pm on Sundays. The pub is also open all afternoon for drinks, but is closed on Mondays.

If The Fox is full or you arrive there too late, a 700 metre walk up a road, admittedly with some fast moving traffic, brings you to the **Wheatsheaf** (01256 398 282) on the busy A30. Part of the Chef & Brewer chain, this is surprisingly characterful place, with an extensive menu that is served **all afternoon**. It even has associations with Jane Austen, who almost certainly came here to collect mail or see visitors off by coach.

For **picnics**, Steventon churchyard is a very pleasant spot. The **village shop** in North Waltham, the **Old Barn Stores**, is a Budgens, open till 7.30pm Monday to Saturday and 5pm on Sundays, which sells hot drinks and ice cream as well as sandwiches. The benches by the duck pond in front of it are not a bad place to sit.

Tea

On Tuesdays to Fridays to 4.30pm and Saturdays to 4pm, the **Overton Gallery** (01256 773 143) has a small tea room. This has just three tables in winter, but more space in summer, when a courtyard is also pressed into service. The centre of Overton also has a couple of other cafes closing at 4pm.

Otherwise a very acceptable tea option is the comfortable and modernised **White Hart** (01256 771 431) which has a cosy bar area with sofas, and a sun deck out the back. It serves the usual range of hot drinks and often has cakes on the bar. Food (eg puddings) is served all afternoon.

Other pubs in Overton include the **Greyhound**, the **Red Lion** and the **Old House at Home**, all of them more traditional "locals".

There is nothing in the vicinity of Overton station, which is 20 minutes walk (1.4km/0.9 miles) from the centre of the town.

WALK DIRECTIONS

Overton station to Deane (3.7km/2.3 miles)

1. Coming off platform 2 (the platform from London), exit the station and walk down across the car park.

The factory on the far side of the railway line was owned by Portals, which for 100 years made paper for banknotes and passports. But in July 2022 its closure was announced and the future of the site is now uncertain.

2. In 40 metres merge with a tarmac lane and keep on downhill, passing some bungalows on the right.
3. In 200 metres ignore Copse Road to the right. In 130 metres more, at a road junction, go straight on.
4. In 70 metres, where the road curves right, keep straight on down a side road. In 30 metres, at a T-junction just after a Give Way sign, turn left onto a quiet country lane.

5. In 450 metres, where the road forks, go right. In 40 metres you cross the **River Test** and carry on along a road which starts to climb gently.

Notice how clear the waters of the **River Test** are. This is characteristic of rivers on chalk, and makes this one of the finest rivers for fly-fishing for trout in the whole country. The river runs for 40 miles from here to Southampton Water and fishing rights are jealously guarded throughout its whole length.

6. In 250 metres turn left off the road through a wooden gate, following a footpath sign, and go very slightly left across a large open field.
7. In 180 metres, just over the brow of the hill, you come to the corner of a area of newly-planted trees. Keep to the left-hand side of this and descend to the river and a footbridge 70 metres away.
8. Cross the footbridge and pass through a wooden gate; then veer slightly right onto a grass path across fields that heads to the right of a low hill in the middle distance. As you walk, the meanders of the River Test keep you company a little way to the right.
9. Follow the path through the field to its far end in 500 metres. Here exit through a wooden gate. In 30 metres more keep straight on at a track junction towards the red brick houses of the village of Ashe. Towards the right-hand end of these you can see **Ashe House**. The pond in the field to the right is the **source of the River Test**.
10. In 170 metres pass through a kissing gate to the left of double fieldgates and turn left before a pond. In 20 metres more turn right at a T-junction before a barn onto a concrete driveway.
11. In 100 metres you pass **Ashe Church** on your left, which seems to be kept locked. (There is a fine display of **snowdrops** here in February).
12. In another 60 metres you come to a road.
- To see **Ashe House** turn right on the road for 100 metres. It is not named, but obvious on the right-hand side when you come to it – a fine Georgian house.

Ashe House was the home of Jane Austen's aunt, Anne Lefroy, and it was here in 1796 that the 20 year old Jane had a flirtation with a young relative of her aunt's, Tom Lefroy, who was visiting from Dublin.

Vast quantities of ink have been spilled over this brief encounter (it lasted only six days) with many exciteable Janeites wanting to see it as their writer's great lost love. The film *Becoming Jane* was based on this premise.

However, we only know about this liaison at all because it happens to be mentioned in two letters from Jane to her sister Cassandra. "Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together," she says, and later: "At length the melancholy day has come when I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy."

But these comments come in the middle of a stream of chatty gossip, all of it written in Jane's trademark ironic tone, and it is impossible to tell if she is being serious or sarcastic. Given Cassandra's jealous guarding in later life of her sister's privacy, it is highly unlikely that she would have let the letters survive had this been a significant romance.

The truth is almost certainly that this was one of many casual flings Jane had as a young woman – and was no more meaningful than that.

13. Otherwise, cross the road by the church and carry on up the footpath on the far side – up a bank and through a kissing gate into a field. Keep on up the right-hand side of the field.
14. In 170 metres you come to the top of the hill. In another 100 metres leave the field by a kissing gate. Beyond this, cross a grassy track and follow a path through the tree boundary. Keep straight on through a high gate and on across a big field, with a fence to your left.
15. In 500 metres exit the field through another high gate and carry straight on through a wooded strip. In 40 metres pass through a kissing gate into parkland (a grassy area, dotted with mature trees).
16. Carry straight on across this, with a fence and lake to your left. In 60

metres you pass between two large trees and beyond this you can see **Deane church** in the trees ahead.

17. In 150 metres carry on alongside the churchyard and in 70 metres more, at its end, pass through a kissing gate in the metal fence to your left and turn right on a tarmac drive, passing **Deane House** on your left.

Deane House looks like it could have been the model for the Bennets' house in *Pride and Prejudice*, and who is to say that it was not? It would have been very familiar to Jane Austen, who lived just up the road and knew the family that lived in it. Her eldest brother James was also the rector of Deane church and lived in a house on the right just before the main road (long ago demolished).

It was James who took over the family home - and the post of vicar of Steventon - in 1800 when Jane's father retired to Bath. As an unmarried daughter, Jane had to accompany her father, leaving the world she had grown up in. It is easy to imagine that she drew on her feelings at this time when writing *Persuasion*, which sees Anne Elliot torn away from her childhood home when her feckless father moves to Bath.

James, incidentally, reckoned he was the writer in the family. As a young man he ran a literary magazine and he also wrote poetry. What he thought of his sister's efforts is not recorded.

18. In 100 metres go through a gate and turn right on the road. (There are usually some large patches of **snowdrops** in this field in February, especially just behind the wall.)

Deane to Steventon Church **(3.8km/2.4 miles)**

19. In 250 metres **cross the main road with care** (some fast cars appear from over the hill either side). Keep straight on up the side road beyond, passing the **Palm Brasserie** restaurant on your right.
20. In 100 metres ignore a track to your left leading to double metal fieldgates and a small warehouse. But in 70 metres more turn left up another track, passing Cheesedown Cottage.

21. You now follow this track gently uphill for 800 metres, ignoring ways off.
22. At the end of that distance, at the top of the hill, pass to the left of a large stand of trees. Beyond this go straight on along a track between open fields, with a hedgerow to your left.
23. In 500 metres you pass under the the Basingstoke to Winchester railway line. Beyond it, leave the track to pass through a gap into a field and turn right along its edge, with the railway embankment to your right.
24. In 130 metres pass through a rather hidden gap in the field corner into the next field, and veer half left across it, aiming just to the right of a distant barn complex.
25. In 400 metres cross into the next field at a footpath post and carry on heading towards the right-hand edge of the barn complex.
26. In 200 metres keep along the field edge, with the barns (or perhaps warehouses) now to your left.
27. In another 130 metres pass into another field. In 40 metres more merge with a tarmac road to your left and carry on in the same direction, still with barns/warehouses to your left.
28. In 270 metres turn left up a lane signposted to Steventon church. In the corner of the field to your right was **the site of the house Jane Austen was brought up in**.

The small fenced area in the field marks the site of a well, which is all that now remains of what was a substantial two storey house standing between there and the road you have just left. It had a curved driveway with two trees that the Austens were said to have planted, one of which still stands. Across the road was a barn where Jane performed plays as a child with her siblings. The fields around you were the glebe lands - the farm from which Jane's father made part of his living.

The house was demolished in 1823 by Jane's brother Edward, who was adopted by rich relatives and inherited the entire Steventon estate. He built a replacement vicarage - the fine white house on the hill behind you.

29. Carry on up the lane (a walk Jane must have known well). There are a

few **bluebells** to the right in late April and early May. In 650 metres the driveway to **Steventon Manor** is on your right and you can see **Steventon church** ahead (*see panel opposite*). **Here you have a choice:**

- **For the main walk, going to lunch in North Waltham**, in 10 metres turn left through a kissing gate into a field. But you might like first to go another 80 metres up the road to visit the church. Continue with the directions in paragraph 30 below.
- **To do the shortcut, missing out lunch in North Waltham**, turn right through a fieldgate just *before* the driveway to Steventon Manor. (Or, coming out of the church, turn right back down the road you have just come up and in 90 metres turn left through this fieldgate just *after* the manor house gateway.) This takes you onto a track, which in 100 metres curves left. In 40 metres more turn right through a metal footpath gate into a field. Go straight on downhill on its left-hand edge. Continue with the directions in paragraph 48 on page 6. By this route it is **0.8km (0.5 miles)** to Steventon village.

Steventon church to The Fox pub (2.3km/1.4 miles)

30. After the kissing gate go diagonally across the field. In 170 metres cross a stile to the right of a metal fieldgate.
31. Carry on across the next field in the same direction to a fieldgate on its far side in 100 metres. Beyond, turn right along the edge of a wood.
32. In 150 metres, at the end of this field, pass through a kissing gate and turn left down the edge of the large field beyond.
33. Follow this field edge for 550 metres to its very far left-hand corner. Here turn right, still on the edge of the same field, following a two-armed footpath sign.
34. In 100 metres turn left through a kissing gate and carry on downhill on the right-hand edge of a field, with a farm and houses visible ahead.
35. In 180 metres, at the bottom of the field, go through a kissing gate and on up the left-hand side of the next field

(with a fence, possibly temporary, on your right-hand side in 2025).

The thing that strikes you about **Steventon church** is how small it is. As vicar of this, Jane Austen's father cannot have been that wealthy, and in fact he both farmed and took pupils to make ends meet. Yet as gentlefolk the family would still (just about) have qualified to socialise in the grand houses round about. You can easily see this idea of being poor relations on the edge of a wealthier world reflected in Jane Austen's novels (think of Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*).

In the church, which is usually unlocked, are various memorials to Jane's relatives. Her eldest brother James (died 1819), who was rector of the church after their father died in 1800, is commemorated to the left in the chancel, just before the altar. A poem on his memorial perhaps reflects his literary ambitions (*see panel on Deane House on page 4*).

On the right in the chancel you can see a monument to the Reverend William Knight, one of Jane's many nephews, who was rector here for 50 years until 1873. Note the memorial below to his three daughters, all of whom died of scarlet fever within six days of each other in 1848. There are also various Digweeds, who lived in **Steventon Manor** next to the church (still there, but the building you see dates from the Victorian era), some of whom Jane would certainly have known.

36. In 120 metres pass through a kissing gate and carry on up a fenced off strip on the left-hand edge of the next field.
37. In 100 metres pass through a kissing gate and turn right on a road into the village of **North Waltham**.
38. In 50 metres ignore a turning to the left and in 80 metres more pass a church to the right. In another 50 metres you come to a road T-junction where you go left, signposted to Dummer and Basingstoke.
39. Ignore minor turnings left and right. In 250 metres you pass a pond left, with the **Old Barn Stores** (a Budgens) beyond it. At the end of the pond turn right at a road T-junction.
40. In 50 metres ignore Coldharbour nos 13-22 to the left. In 220 metres more, at the top of the hill, you come to a

three-way junction. Here fork right. You will find **The Fox** 200 metres down this road on the right.

*If this pub is closed or full, or if you reach it too late, there is an alternative – the **Wheatsheaf** on the A30 main road. To reach this keep straight on at the three-way junction. Watch out for fast moving traffic on this road. In 750 metres it brings you to the A30 and the Wheatsheaf is on your left. After lunch retrace your steps to the three-way road junction and continue with paragraph 42 below.*

The Fox pub to Steventon village (3.4km/2.1 miles)

41. Coming out of the Fox, retrace your steps into the village, as follows: first turn left on the road, and in 200 metres at the three way junction, turn left downhill into the village of North Waltham.
42. In 270 metres, at the Give Way sign, veer slightly left (straight on more or less, in fact), past the pond on your right.
43. In 250 metres more, just before the church, there is a road to the right signposted to Steventon and Oakley.
Here you have a choice:
 - You can if you wish now **retrace your outward route across the fields to Steventon** church. To do this turn right up the side road and continue with paragraph 75 on page 8.
 - **For the main route**, which involves 1.4km of road walking along a quiet country lane, ignore the side road and keep on up the road you are on, passing the church on your right. Continue with the directions below.
44. The road goes down into a dip for 100 metres, then starts to climb. In 500 metres it largely levels out and is gently undulating.
45. 350 metres after this the road has trees on either side and starts to descend.
46. In 400 metres more turn right up a track. Pass through a green fieldgate in 20 metres and on up a track between a hedge left and a fence right.

(This track seems to be in normal pedestrian use. If access to it is

blocked, remain on the road for another 500 metres and then turn right at a crossroads into Steventon village. In 600 metres turn left up a track, a signposted path crossroads and resume the walk directions in paragraph 50 below.)

47. In 400 metres the track runs alongside a wood to your right. In another 180 metres, just past Steventon Manor which is visible to the right, turn left through a metal gate into a large field. Keep on down the left-hand edge of this.
48. In 650 metres, at the bottom of the field, you emerge onto a road, with the houses of Steventon village left and right.

Steventon village to Overton village (4.1km/2.5 miles)

49. Cross the road and go on up a track beyond.
50. In 450 metres you once again pass under the Winchester to Basingstoke railway line.
51. Just beyond the railway line ignore a gate with a yellow arrow ahead, and instead veer left for ten metres and then right onto a footpath which climbs up the left-hand edge of a field (with a hedge to the left and another developing along the fence line to your right).
52. In 250 metres, just after the top of the field, you come to a junction. Go more or less straight on uphill here on a grassy track, with a hedge now to your right and young trees to your left.
53. In another 250 metres, at the top of the hill and just beyond an entrance to a field to the right, **turn right to leave the track**. Pass through a kissing gate in five metres and then turn left to pass through another in 20 metres.
54. Head across a field beyond towards a house.
55. In 250 metres, at the corner of the house garden, pass through a kissing gate and carry on up a fenced path with the house garden to your right.
56. In 100 metres cross a road and carry on through a kissing gate to the right of a double fieldgate. In 10 metres pass through another kissing gate and veer slightly right downhill across a

large field (*or, if water buffalo are in the field, do not pass through the second gate but follow a detour around the field edge along a fenced strip*).

57. Head for the bottom right-hand corner of the field. In 350 metres, when you get there, pass through two kissing gates (*or just one if you have followed the diversion around the field edge*) and curve left with the path through a tree boundary (there are **bluebells** to your right in late April or early May).
58. In 20 metres pass through yet another kissing gate into another field and turn right along its edge, with the wood now to your right.
59. In 200 metres turn left with the field corner. In 100 metres you come to a tarmac farm road and go right. (More **bluebells** to the right here in season).
60. In 500 metres you pass through double metal fieldgates and the road turns right towards a large farm complex.
61. In another 80 metres pass through another set of double metal fieldgates, and carry on past a barn on your left-hand side. In 70 metres more, at the end of the barn, pass through yet another set of double metal fieldgates.
62. In another 100 metres, just after a pebble-dash farmhouse right and opposite the entrance to a farmyard, **turn left** up a signposted footpath through a metal gate. Carry on down a fenced path between fields.
63. In 300 metres this brings you to a road, where you go right, downhill. In 130 metres houses to the left mark the start of **Overton**.
64. In 200 metres more ignore a road called Hazelcombe to the left, and in 50 metres more ignore Pound Road left.
65. In another 250 metres at a crossroads with Two Gate Lane and Sprents Lane you have a choice.
 - **To skip tea**, keep straight on at the crossroads to reach a crossroads with the main road in 230 metres. Cross over this and carry on down Station Road opposite. Continue with paragraph 70 opposite.
 - **To go into the centre of Overton for tea**, turn left down Sprents

Lane and continue with the next paragraph.

66. In 130 metres turn right at a crossroads in front of the **Greyhound** pub.
67. In 280 metres you come to a crossroads with traffic lights. **The White Hart** is ahead on the right at this junction, or if you turn left you will come on in 150 metres to the **Overton Gallery** on the left – see **Tea** on page 2 for details.

Overton village to Overton station (1.4km/0.9 miles)

*Allow at least **20 minutes** for this walk: there is nothing in the vicinity of the station if you miss a train, so time your departure from tea carefully.*

68. After tea:
 - **If coming out of the Overton Gallery** turn left and return to the crossroads with the traffic lights. Carry straight on, passing the White Hart on your left.
 - **If coming out of the White Hart**, facing back up the street you came down in paragraph 67, turn left, heading away from the traffic lights.
69. In 30 metres ignore private roads left and right, but in another 50 metres turn left up Station Road
70. In 80 metres you pass a pub on the right with the odd name of **Old House at Home**.
71. In another 600 metres you cross the River Test, with Quidhampton Mill to your left.
72. In another 170 metres ignore two roads forking right and curve left with the main road.
73. In another 70 metres fork left up a road, signposted to the station.
74. The station is at the top of the hill in 400 metres. Cross the footbridge to platform 1 for trains to London.

Field route from North Waltham to Steventon

This is the reverse of the outward route in paragraphs 30 to 38 and is included here for those who want to avoid road walking.

75. Having turned right up the side road past the church in paragraph 43, in 180 metres turn left through a kissing gate, following a footpath sign. Go downhill on a fenced-off strip on the right-hand side of a field.
76. In 100 metres pass through a kissing gate and carry on down the right-hand edge of a field.
77. In 120 metres, at the bottom of the hill, go through a kissing gate and on up the left-hand side of the field beyond.
78. In 180 metres, at the top of the field, turn right. In 15 metres turn left through a kissing gate and beyond it turn right along the edge of the large field beyond.
79. In 100 metres, in the field corner, do not cross into the next field but turn left up the edge of the field you are in, following a footpath sign.
80. In 350 metres you pass under a line of mini-pylons: in another 70 metres veer left with the field edge, now with a wood to your right.
81. In 130 metres more go right through a kissing gate. Carry on down the right-hand edge of the field beyond, with a wood to your left.
82. In 150 metres cross a stile 10 metres to the right of a metal fieldgate and turn half left across the field beyond. **Steventon church** is visible to your left.
83. In 100 metres cross a stile to the left of a metal fieldgate. Keep straight on, heading diagonally towards the right-hand corner of the field.
84. In 170 metres pass through a kissing gate in the corner of the field and turn right on the road.
85. In 10 metres, at the end of the fenced garden of Steventon Manor on your left, turn left through a fieldgate (*ie the second gate, not the gate into the manor grounds*) and carry on up the track beyond, following a footpath sign.

86. In 100 metres the track curves left. In 30 metres more, turn right through a metal gate and immediately veer right into a field corner. Keep on down the left-hand edge of this large field.

Continue with the directions in paragraph 48 on page 6.