



# The Hundred Parishes

## Circular Walks – number 161

### Farnham and Stansted Mountfitchet – 5.2 miles (8 kms)

*This countryside walk is mostly within the parish of Farnham with about 2 miles in the more rural parts of Stansted Mountfitchet and just a little of Manuden. The route is mostly on quiet paths and lanes. There are no stiles. There are seats in Farnham churchyard. The route passes the Three Horseshoes pub and restaurant in Hazel End after about 1 mile.*

**Start and finish:** The walk starts and finishes in the car park beside Farnham Church, 300 yards East of the road junction close to Farnham School.  
Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: TL481248 - Postcode: CM23 1HR (this relates to the beginning of the church drive).  
The route can be followed on Ordnance Survey Explorer Map number 195.

Before we set off, you may like to visit the parish church if it is open (which is not often). Please cover or remove dirty boots. The parish church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, was built in 1858-59 on the foundations of an earlier church. Construction was overseen and funded by Robert Gosling who owned much of Farnham and the rector, Rev William John Copeland.

We leave the church car park with the church and war memorial on our left, heading South on a public footpath. This is a field-edge path with hedgerow on the left, heading gently uphill. After about 200 yards, we can look back to the left for a view of Hassobury, the home of the aforementioned Robert Gosling. We will pause here to learn a little about the mansion and some of its occupants over the years.

Hassobury, in High Gothic style and with many chimneys, was built in 1868-1870 by a father and son, each named Robert Gosling. It replaced an earlier house that had been purchased in 1773 by their ancestor, William Gosling, a wealthy banker. The manor of Hassobury had appeared in the Domesday Book of 1086, alongside the manor of Farnham.

William Gosling and his descendants enlarged the estate by buying much of Farnham. In 1930, the Hassobury estate covered 6,000 acres, somewhat larger than the whole parish of Farnham, and included about 200 dwellings. Around that time, 1930, the house employed 16 indoor and 20 outdoor servants, apart from all those who worked on the farms. Over the years, several members of the Gosling family played prominent roles in society: a number served as high sheriff of Essex and one of these, Robert Cunliffe Gosling (1868 to 1922) also captained England at football in the 1890s. Descendants still live and farm on the estate.

The Hassobury mansion was used during the Second World War as a convalescent home for injured servicemen. It was then occupied by educational establishments, most recently as a private school, Waterside, from 1976 until 1994 when the school closed. The mansion was then partitioned into several individual houses. We will see the building again fairly soon.

Continuing along the footpath, we reach another hedgerow on the left. Just before it, we ignore a footpath that turns off to the left, heading downhill. We continue ahead with hedgerow on our left.

Our path passes a small wood on the left: Oak Plantation.

The path drops down onto a lane where we turn left. The lane descends. Soon, just after Oak Plantation, another view of Hassobury appears to the left.

At the foot of the hill, the lane turns left, briefly following the route of Bourne Brook. Occasionally, the brook overflows and floods this stretch of road.

[Should we be unable to proceed, we can retrace to Oak Plantation, turning right just afterwards to retrace along the field-edge footpath. After 200 yards, we turn sharp right onto the straight cross-field footpath which descends, passing to the right of a solitary tree, to meet our lane via a footbridge just beyond Bourne Brook]

Soon after the brook, the lane climbs, quite steeply for a while. From time to time, we again see Hassobury over to the left.

After the top of the climb, we follow the lane round several bends and gradually come into the Farnham hamlet of Hazel End.

Most of the hamlet is a conservation area and many of the buildings are also individually listed.

On the left we pass a range of weatherboarded farm outbuildings that date back to the 17th century and then there are more buildings of similar vintage on either side of the road.

We reach a junction, with a small green and pond. To the left, behind a low flintstone wall, is 17th-century Home Farmhouse. On the right, an entrance leads to Hazel End Farm and Vineyard, and this is followed by 16th-century Upper Farmhouse with exposed timber framing.

On the green is a large sarsen stone with a band of pebbles like puddingstone. This stone was retrieved from a field and moved here in the 1990s. It was probably formed around 50 million years ago and deposited nearby by a retreating glacier. There is another, somewhat smaller, sarsen stone nearer the pond.

Ahead of us, opposite the green, are three thatched, 17th-century cottages.

Note the Victorian postbox in the wall on the right – distinguished by its “VR” cipher.

Our route goes straight across the road onto a footpath, but if you would like refreshment, the Three Horseshoes pub and restaurant lies within a hundred yards to the right. Whether you turn right or go straight across, take care as traffic sometimes travels fast along this narrow road.

From the pub, when safe cross the road and turn left to retrace a hundred yards, turning right onto the footpath immediately before the first thatched cottage.

. . . or . . .

If you choose not to divert to the pub, from the pond go straight across the road, with care, and take the footpath immediately to the right of the first thatched cottage.

The public footpath leads immediately onto Farnham Cricket Club's ground. This has been the club's ground since the 1930s. We will keep to the left, as far as possible avoiding the field of play, and passing close to the pavilions. Looking back to the right, we get a good view of The Three Horseshoes which has been considerably updated since its 17th-century origins.

After the pavilions, we pass an unusual stile on our left. At the end of the field, we follow the fence round to the right and leave by turning left onto a footpath.

This field-edge path descends beneath a line of mature trees. Ahead is the valley of the River Stort and on the far side of the valley the farmland is in Stansted Mountfitchet.

At the end of the field, our path drops down to Watermill Lane and we go straight ahead along the lane. In about 200 yards, we cross over the River Stort and, in so doing, we leave Farnham parish and enter Stansted Mountfitchet. The Stort flows South, from left to right, eventually joining the River Lea and then the Thames.

On the right, we pass Watermill Farm which has 17th-century origins. This narrow lane now climbs fairly steeply for a while – a truly “sunken lane” with fields high above us on each side.

We bear left to join Limekiln Lane which comes from the right. We continue to climb but now more gently.

At a point where the lane bears right, we may stop and look over the gate on the left. The view is back down to the Stort valley and up the hill on the far side. Up the hill, we may be able to see buildings at Hazel End although in summer most are obscured by tree foliage. In summer, just one building may be visible and that is probably the lodge house beside the main entrance to Hassobury.

Continue up the lane.

Pass 17th-century Hole Farm Cottage on the left. Soon we come to a small green on the left which marks the entrance to Hole Farm.

We continue just past the green and immediately turn left off the road onto a bridleway. The entrance can sometimes be muddy. Once on the bridleway, this is a good place to pause and look left at the ancient farm buildings of Hole Farm: the farmhouse dates back to the

early 16th century and the range of barns with red-tile roofs date from the 16th to the 20th century.

Continue along the bridleway, climbing gently with hedgerow on the right and fence and field on the left.

At the top of the climb, the bridleway meets a track where we turn left. After only 50 yards, we turn right onto a footpath.

After a little while, this path descends in a straight line between fields, quite clear albeit somewhat overgrown in summer. We are now descending back into the Stort valley.

Over to the right we can see buildings on the outskirts of Manuden. Later, Manuden's church comes into view.

At the foot of the descent, we reach the River Stort and cross on a concrete bridge with metal handrails. The river often appears dry. On the far side, we enter the southern edge of Manuden parish and keep straight ahead.

In another 200 yards we reach a sometimes-busy road. When safe, turn right and stay on the right, facing traffic, but for only about 25 yards. When safe, cross and head up the bridleway. As we are once again leaving the Stort, we have another long, straight, steady climb, passing along a line of oak trees on our right.

From time to time, the view back shows the straight path that we used to descend into the valley.

Towards the top of the climb, we get a glimpse of Hassobury, over to our left.

When the path reaches woodland, we keep straight ahead along an invisible parish boundary. On our left is Home Wood in Farnham and on the right Oozes Wood in Manuden.

At the end of the woodland, we emerge onto a field and turn left along the field edge, keeping Home Wood on the left. This bridleway gets little sunshine and can be muddy.

At the end of the field, we continue ahead, bearing left and descending in a thin strip of woodland.

At the end of the woodland, we cross a bridge with metal handrails over Bourne Brook, at this point leaving Manuden behind and being fully in Farnham. We enter a field and keep straight ahead on the bridleway, sometimes rather overgrown in summer, gradually leaving the line of woodland on our right and passing to the left of a solitary dead tree.

After the dead tree, we are heading towards several buildings, in particular the one on the left with a red roof.

At the far side of the field, we pass through a gate and continue to head towards the red roof. To the right is a tall house with central chimney stack. This is Savenend Farm, dating from the 17th or 18th century.

We continue ahead to leave the field, now on a drive and finding that the red roof on our right is on a black barn.

Our bridleway / drive reaches another drive that comes in from the left. We bear right, then keep to the right of a small triangular green to turn right onto a lane. This is not a through road, but is used occasionally by traffic.

The lane climbs gently and after a while we pass a sign which tells us we are entering Chatter End, another small hamlet within Farnham parish.

Further along, on the right, Mission Hall Cottage has an interesting assortment of animals, birds and a windmill in the garden. This was once a Baptist chapel.

Just a little further along is number 5, an attractive 18th-century thatched cottage with a host of dormer windows peeping from beneath the thatch.

Immediately after number 5, we turn left onto a footpath, a grassy field-edge path with hedgerow on the right.

After about 60 yards, we follow the path round to the left, now on a clear, grassy cross-field path.

At the end of the field, the path turns right, following the field edge with hedgerow on the left.

At the end of the field, we go straight ahead on a narrow path between hedges and then fences to eventually emerge onto a lane. This is Thrimley Lane, a bridleway, and here we turn left into Farnham's main centre of population.

We pass several newer houses on the left. On the right is an ancient wall and behind it, largely hidden, is Thrimley House, a former rectory and one-time home of some of the Gosling family.

We soon reach a small green and keep straight ahead, passing the entrance to Thrimley House on the right and Farnham village hall on the left. The hall was built in 1902 and has benefitted from recent modernisation.

Keep straight ahead, passing a telephone kiosk on the right which is now used as a mini greenhouse. On our left, numbers 46 and 44 date from about 1800 AD.

Number 38, on the left with white weatherboarding, served as Farnham Post Office for 30 years until 1988.

We are now in Rectory Lane. Most houses here were built in the mid-20th century as council houses. This is where a good proportion of Farnham's population live. The parish's total

population was 410 in the 2011 Census. This count did not include the giant llama and various other model animals to be found in the front garden of number 35 on the right.

Towards the end of Rectory Lane, numbers 4 and 6, set back on the left, date from around 1800 AD. They display the large letters "WG", the initials of William Gosling who would have built them.

Next on the left is Farnham's primary school. This was built by Robert Gosling and Reverend Copeland, opening in 1855.

Soon, when safe, we go straight ahead onto the green with a signpost. On our right, Globe Farm has been updated since its 17th century origins.

When safe, we go straight ahead to cross the road and then turn right, signposted towards Bishop's Stortford. In just a few yards, we turn left onto the drive to Farnham Church.

As we start to descend the tree-lined drive, the chimneys of Hassobury can be seen ahead, a little to the left, above the trees.

At the end of the drive, we reach the car park on the right where we started. If you didn't get a chance to visit the church before the walk, you might like to try again (although the church is not often open) – but after changing from muddy boots!

You can read more about the parishes of Farnham, Stansted Mountfitchet and Manuden on [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk).

This route description, last updated 09 July 2021, was downloaded from [www.hundredparishes.org.uk](http://www.hundredparishes.org.uk) Please email any suggestions for improving the route or the route description to [hundredparishes@btinternet.com](mailto:hundredparishes@btinternet.com).

A diagram covering this route, based on the Ordnance Survey map, is shown below. It is published under © Crown copyright 2020 OS 100062498.

