

WINCHMORE HILL VILLAGE WALK

*Exploring the former rural industries of
Winchmore Hill*



WINCHMORE HILL

An introduction to the area



The name Winchmore Hill is thought to derive from its position at the boundary of the parishes of Penn, Coleshill and Amersham, which was originally marked by a stone. "Wincel" is the old English word for corner or angle and "maer" means boundary.

For much of its existence (recorded since the 12th century) the villagers were engaged in agriculture and husbandry, based around the common land, or working for one of the local estates or larger farms.

Employment diversified as the development of the chair-making, lacework, beadwork, straw-plaiting and pottery industries gathered pace from the 18th century onwards. The availability of beechwood for chair-making, clay and water for pot-making, and improved transport routes to Wycombe and London made Winchmore Hill an ideal centre for these activities. By 1901 chair-making was the main source of employment in the village. Lacework, beadwork and straw-plaiting were home-based activities undertaken by women. The pottery industry was also an important local industry, with a pottery operating until the early 20th century.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WALK

Getting there and back



Directions:

The walk starts and finishes on the Common in Winchmore Hill by the crossroads, next to The Plough. Parking is by the roadside.



The Plough, Winchmore Hill (Amersham Museum)

Distance:

Short walk 1.6 miles ≈ 50 minutes

Longer walk 3.6 miles ≈ 1 hour 30 minutes

Buses:

Visit bustimes.org

By road:

Winchmore Hill is signposted off the A404 Amersham to High Wycombe road.

Map:

OS Explorer 172

Refreshments:

At The Plough or The Potters Arms.

Level of difficulty:

Easy walking on quiet roads, local paths and across grassland/woodland. The paths can be muddy at times and walking shoes are recommended. Some parts are narrow and not suitable for pushchairs.



THE WALK

Both the long and short walks begin at Step 1

1 **Start on the Common** at the crossroads by The Plough (A). The pub was run for four generations by the Pursey family from 1870 to the 1960s. George Pursey moved into the pub in 1870 with his family, extended it and set up a chair-turning workshop behind the pub. George's two sons Thomas and William worked as chair-makers; Thomas took over running the pub in 1909 with his wife Emma. It is not known when the chair-turning workshop behind the pub closed down, but it was still in operation at the start of WW1.



George Pursey outside The Plough pub (Stuart King archive)



The Pursey family in 1903 in the orchard behind The Plough pub. Thomas, standing behind his father George, took over the pub in 1919, and the youngest boy, Frank, became landlord in 1936. Frank's daughter Dulcie, with her husband Albert Moyes, ran the pub from 1953 (Richard Ayres archive)



2 With your back to The Plough pub, **head diagonally across the Common** to a row of cottages on a small road (B). Number 3 was home to Jane Lawrence, one of the lacemakers in the village, born in 1863. Lacemaking was hard and poorly paid, but the work provided essential means for women living alone or for wives and unmarried daughters to supplement family incomes.



Lacemaker Jane Lawrence (Amersham Museum)

3 **Walk up the small road** towards The Potters Arms. **Turn right** at the junction with Fagnall Lane opposite The Potters Arms and adjoining Kiln Cottages (C). The Potters Arms has been a beerhouse/public house since before 1830. Its various owners and tenants in the 1800s were both beer retailers and potters. A range of domestic "brown



ware" pottery was produced, which included kitchen pans and flowerpots. The potters created a large pit digging clay on the Common, which eventually created a deep pond (now filled in). Local residents recall that a small railway track brought clay from pits between Fagnall Lane and Coleshill Lane. The industry was in severe decline by the start of the 20th century, and the pottery was demolished in 1932.

4 **Continue walking down Fagnall Lane.** A short way on your right is the Wesleyan Methodist chapel, now a private house (St Andrews) (D). The Wesleyan chapel opened in 1861. Joseph Hatch Snr (a chair-maker) played the violin here. In 1937 the chapel was sold to the Church of England. After 1960, congregations dwindled, and in 1991 the building was sold, and rebuilt as a private house.

5 **Continue down Fagnall Lane. Stop after about 170 metres** just as you reach Fagnall Farm Cottages on your left (if you reach Fagnall Farm you have gone too far). The 1970s house on the left of Fagnall Farm Cottages is the site of Arthur Hext's chair-making workshop which he set up after his return from WW1 (E). Arthur was



self-employed, assembling Windsor chairs which were sold in the East End of London. The remnants of the workshop fireplace can just be seen at the back of the car park area to the side of the drive. Arthur and his wife Elsie lived here – their small bungalow had no running water until after WW2; they grew all their own vegetables. Elsie worked as a chair-caner and later as an upholsterer, and a domestic servant.



Arthur Hext outside his chairmaking workshop in Fagnall Lane (Hext family archive)

6 *Continue walking down the lane*, past Fagnall Farm buildings on your left. **Take the marked footpath** through a gate on your right shortly after passing the “end of speed limit” signs. There is a marker for Penn estate walk number 3. **Follow the path across the**



field towards a building (Glory Farm). Go through the gate and walk uphill to the next gate in the top right corner of the field. Go through this and follow the path ahead, keep the hedge on your right-hand side and still follow the marker Penn estate walk number 3. **Go slightly right at the end of the field then continue ahead** with the hedge now on your left. At the end of this field **follow the path ahead** with an orchard on your right.

7 When you reach the lane, **turn right** and **walk up the lane**. As the road bends round to the left **take the footpath ahead** of you to the right of Dell Cottage (one of the oldest cottages in the village, believed to date back to the 1550s). **Follow the footpath** to arrive back on the Common.

8 **Walk across the Common** passing the children’s playground on your left. **Cross the road** and **continue downhill** towards the allotments on Whielden Lane. Here, **turn right** and **continue along the pavement** until you reach The Hill.



LONGER WALK (LW)

If you wish to extend your walk, follow these steps. Otherwise, skip to Step 9.

8.1 **Do not turn right** up The Hill but **continue straight ahead** until you reach the width restriction in the road. Just before the width restriction **take the public footpath** on your left through a gap in the hedge into a field. **Cross the field** ahead with the hedgerow on your left. **Follow the path** signed Penn estate number 5 into the wood. Approximately 15–20 metres after entering the wood, **turn right** to continue following the Penn estate number 5 footpath until you reach a track. **Turn right** onto the track, still following the Penn estate number 5 footpath sign. Ignore any turnings off the track and follow it to the junction with the road.

8.2 **Cross the road**. Now take care to find the correct path. **Turn immediately left** to **follow the path** that runs parallel to the road (not the path marked Penn House estate number 5). After approximately 30 metres, **cross over a small bridge**. You will shortly arrive in the former Buckinghamshire County Council picnic area (1). This is the site of Hollandsdean, the chair-factory owned by the Hatch family, which was in operation from at least 1851 to 1939. J Hatch & Sons had its heyday in the early 20th century (run by Joseph Hatch Snr and his sons Joseph David, Frederick, and William). The factory was one of the first in the area to introduce machine tools; it employed 30–40

men. The late 1930s brought decline and the factory was sold to a timber merchant at the start of WW2. The buildings were destroyed by fire in the 1950s.



8.3 *Keep straight ahead* through the former car park to **exit through a gate on your left onto the road**. Now **turn right** and **follow the path**, keeping on the well-marked and well-used path **straight ahead** as the road bends round to the left.

8.4 At the end of this path, **turn immediately right** into a driveway with a block of 4 garages at its end. **Take the signposted footpath to the left of the garages**. **Follow the path** through a gate, **turn left** and then round to the right and uphill between two fences into the wood. **Go through the gate towards** the top of the hill to enter the woods.

8.5 After a few metres **bear right to follow the path** through the woods, ascending up the hill. As you walk through the woods, observe the old saw pits to your right (J). These were still in use in the early 1900s – the wood sawyers would cut whole trees into planks using a huge saw held by one man standing above the piece of wood (the top dog) and one below in the deep saw pit (the underdog). **Continue uphill** until you meet a crossing track. **Turn right here and stay on this path** (part of the Chiltern Way), ignoring all turns both left and right. **Exit the wood** and **continue ahead across a field** with a hedge on your left.

8.6 **Follow this path** until you emerge on The Hill. **Turn left here** and **continue from number 11 on the short walk**.



9 **Turn right up The Hill**. Many of the terraced cottages on The Hill were owned by the Pursey and Hatch families and may have been lived in by chair bodgers and their families. On the right, now the entrance to Orchard Cottages, is the site of the second chair-making workshop owned by the Pursey family, established sometime between 1871 and 1881 (F). William Pursey sold it to George Rose, Frederick Sears and Sydney Hext, to become Rose & Co, shortly after WW1. The firm employed about 28 people; it was sold again in 1964 and finally closed down in 1988 – the last surviving chair factory in the village.

10 **Continue up The Hill**. On the left, now the Securon factory, is the site of Cherry Tree Chair Works, established in 1922 by William Pursey's sons Sidney and George (grandsons of George Pursey of The Plough) (G). The chair factory employed 20 people in the 1930s, making upholstered and dining room furniture as well as the traditional Windsor chairs. The factory transferred to George's son Arthur (a 4th-generation Pursey) after WW2. The firm went into receivership in 1963. Arthur sold the company in the early 1970s to Securon, a company making car seat belts.



- 11** **Continue up The Hill.** (The longer walk rejoins the short walk here.) On the right is the Primitive Methodist chapel, opened in 1860 (H). There was a Sunday School here and entertainment programmes with music, singing and afternoon teas. William Pursey was conductor of the chapel band.



Methodist chapel with Arthur and Elizabeth (nee Cox) Hatch outside (Amersham Museum)

- 12** On reaching The Plough at the top of The Hill you have completed the walk.



CHAIR-MAKING IN THE CHILTERN

The chair-making industry developed in Buckinghamshire in the 18th century. The abundance of beechwood and improved road transport links enabled furniture for the London market to be made locally and then transported to the capital. By 1790 there were four workshops that made chairs in the Chilterns, by 1830 there were 20 factories and workshops, and by 1877 there were around 100. Beechwood was used, along with elm, ash, cherry and yew.

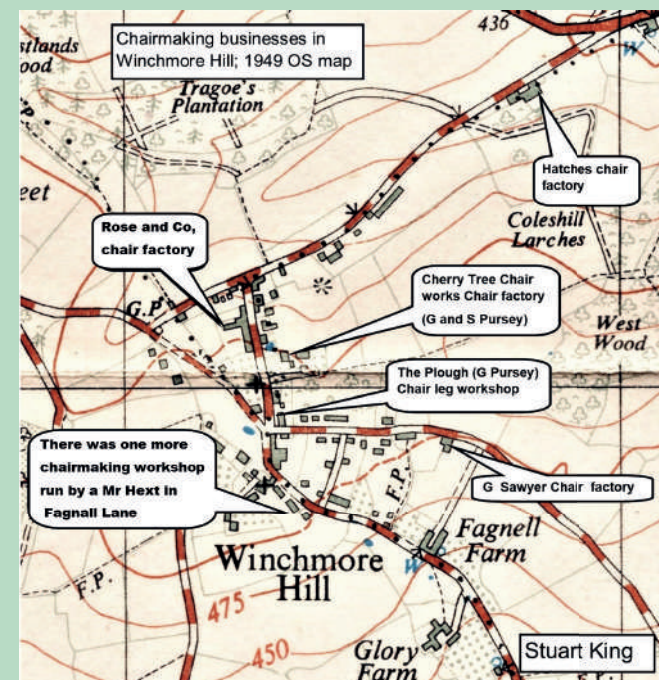
The history of High Wycombe has become synonymous with chair-making, although chairs were not made there in large numbers until after 1800. The local industry was characterised by wood turners (who became known as “bodgers”) making chair legs in the local woodlands, together with large numbers of small factories where other chair parts were made and the finished chairs assembled.

The most famous chair produced was the Windsor chair, characterised by its solid elm seat into which the other components slotted. The wheel back double bow is one of the best known designs.

The labour was intensive and there were child apprentices. Girls made cane seats

for different types of chairs. The chairs were transported on horse-drawn wagons. Factory fires were quite common and High Wycombe established the first fire brigade in Buckinghamshire.

From the mid 19th century Winchmore Hill saw an expansion of small chair-making workshops and factories, run and owned by local people. In 1871 there was 1 chair-making business in Winchmore Hill; by 1901 there were 3, and by 1930 there were 5. In 1901, chair-making was the main village employment, with 46 out of 99 men working in the trade. The industry declined sharply as a result of cheaper competition from abroad following the end of WW2 and the last factory closed in 1988.



Chair factories in Winchmore Hill (Stuart King archive)

THE ROUTES


The Key:


 Start/end point

 Short walk waypoint

 Long walk waypoint

 Landmark

 Short walk

 Long walk



LACEMAKING

Bobbin lacemaking was a cottage industry probably introduced into England in the 16th century. It is made by using thread (preferably linen) wound on bone bobbins hung over a straw-filled, very firm pillow, to weave the lace. The local Buckinghamshire lace was very fine and beautiful and popular with aristocracy and royalty in the 19th century. It was slow and complicated work, and the women making lace might earn about 6d a day when a loaf of bread cost 1d.

Local drapers, who often also acted as lace dealers, supplied linen thread and patterns to their cottage workers. In 1854 grocer George Palmer in Winchmore Hill was probably a lace dealer. His widow Harriet later remarried Abel Slade and she was described as a lace dealer in 1861, living in nearby Coleshill Green. In the 1871 census there were 23 lacemakers in Winchmore Hill, but by 1891 this had fallen to just 6. The industry declined due to competition from machine-made lace and changing fashions.

In 1871 one of the Winchmore Hill lacemakers was a single young woman living on her own – maybe she ran one of the lacemaking schools for girls found in some of the Chiltern villages.

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN ENGLAND



Methodism has its roots in 18th century Anglicanism. Its founder was a Church of England minister, John Wesley (1703–1791), who sought to challenge the religious assumptions of the day and reform the Church of England. While at Oxford as a Fellow of Lincoln College, Wesley became leader of a group that became known as the “Methodists” because of their emphasis on methodical Bible study and devotion. Later they added social services to these activities.

Following his return from a disastrous mission to the USA, from 1738, Wesley began to preach widely that salvation was available to everyone. His enthusiasm and fundamentalist beliefs were regarded as antagonistic by the established Church of England. Although Wesley always declared that his movement should remain within the Anglican Church, it developed into an autonomous church and in 1795 Methodists in Britain became legally able to conduct marriages and perform the sacraments.

The Primitive Methodists were a splinter group set up in 1808 after the Methodist lay-preacher Hugh Bourne was expelled from the movement. The Primitive Methodists differed from Wesleyan Methodists in several regards, including the



Methodist chapel (now a house) (Jane Barker)

encouragement of female evangelists.

Both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist communities grew rapidly during the 19th century, with a wide appeal to labourers who were often left outside organised religion at the time. It was from among the Primitives that many Trade Union leaders emerged towards the end of the century.

Another major Methodist branch was the United Methodist Church, which itself was formed from earlier mergers of smaller Methodist groupings. In 1932 the various branches of Methodists reunited to form the present Methodist Church in Britain. The Methodists are known for their rich musical tradition.

This walking tour was developed and written by Jane Barker, as part of the Woodlanders' Lives and Landscapes Project of the Chalk Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership.

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