

Walking and Drinking (6)

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This Summer I would like to suggest a walk around Braishfield, a large village less than three miles northeast of Romsey. Although there are no shops left in the village, it is a great place for real ale drinkers because of the three pubs of differing styles.

The **Newport Inn** in Newport Lane has been run by Janet and Bernard Cook for very many years, and before that by Janet's parents. It is a totally unimproved inn with a fifties feel about it. I have been drinking there since 1965 when I moved to Hampshire, and, apart from a small change to the bar position in the public bar, it seems just the same. Many *Hop Press* readers will know the pub well, and have very fond memories of it. The Newport is now a Fuller's pub, though it still appears to be owned by Gale's, so the beers are BBB, HSB, and Festival Mild or Fuller's Winter Ale or Adnams. The simple, but famed, ploughman's and sarnies are recommended. Visit it now; it cannot last unchanged for ever.

The **Wheatsheaf** has had a new lease of life since Peter & Jenny

Jones took over some years ago. The pub is comfortable, homely, and just slightly chaotic. The beers and food on offer are generally adventurous and local. Peter keeps his own pigs which form part of the menu. The beers always include Ringwood Best Bitter, often Taylors' Landlord and from the Isle of Wight, Goddard's, with others mainly coming from local breweries.

The **Dog and Crook** is a neat looking modest pub at the south end of the village, ably run by Alan Arthur (his first pub) and Miriam Bevan. Again Ringwood Best Bitter is a regular, the second beer is often London Pride, with a third beer on, when trade permits (how sensible).

Start the walk from the village centre.

Start from the T-junction in the middle of the village (by the red telephone box and the sign to the Newport Inn). Walk downhill (northwards) to the War Memorial, turn right into Church Lane, then immediately fork left at the sign to the Church with the additional duck warning sign, and immediately pass the duck pond on your right. When the road bends sharp left towards the

church, keep straight on past 'Festina Lente.'

Ignore a footpath on the right, and very soon after the road reduces to a well surfaced track leading to Merrie Meade Farm. Just before the farm, turn left onto a footpath that skirts the clutter of the farmyard, then leads into open countryside. Just after a stile on the right, the path squeezes between a tall fence and hedge and leads straight on to a few steps down onto Braishfield Road. Turn right onto the road which has a wide verge, bends left and goes downhill to a crossroads. (If you want to shorten the walk, turn left at the crossroads into Paynes Hay Road and omit the next two paragraphs!)

At the crossroads go straight on along Kings Somborne Road, then immediately left and uphill on a bridleway leading to Windmill Cottage. Ignore all turnings, and as the gradient eases bend right and left by Windmill Cottage. Stay on the curving and gently climbing main track with private rides on both sides. After a hedge on the left, a sharp bend left, and a hedge of trees on the right, the track suddenly bends right but follow a bridle-way sign going straight ahead along a somewhat muddy



path. (Alternatively, cheat slightly and use the parallel, drier, private ride. Further on there is a clear gap in the low hedge that separates the ride from the path, showing that many others have walked this way). After the gap, the muddy path soon leads onto a small lane (Eldon Road which links Braishfield and Kings Somborne).

Turn left on the lane going slightly downhill. Bend right at the first house on the left, then just before the first house on the right cross a stile on the left into a field. Turn right along the field edge parallel to the lane you have just left and cross into the next field.

Immediately turn left to climb along the thicketed edge of the field. Cross a stile in the field corner into a very large field, keep to the left hand side, bending right after 100 yards or so. After two more kinks in the field edge, and a dilapidated footpath sign, you come to the end of the field. Here you pass through a wooden chicane and go downhill on a small path between a hedge and a low fence to a cross lane in the valley.

Ignore the footpath straight ahead (though it will take you back to Braishfield directly). Instead, turn right along the lane (Paynes Hay Road again), past dilapidated farm buildings with a fine weathercock, past the fine farmhouse, and turn left over a stile into a grassy field. Keep to the left hand side of the field to a second stile onto a sometimes muddy path going uphill inside the edge of a wood. Soon the path crosses a trivial, singleplank footbridge and opens out into a field of young trees. Continue along the left hand side of this field to a very large open field by a double footpath post. Climb gently along the left hand side of this field with views all around suddenly improving, until the summit is reached near a couple of fine isolated oak trees.

The view here is impressive considering the modest elevation — you are about to drop back into Braishfield village. Continue along the left hand side to a final stile which surprisingly takes you through the back garden of a house into the drive of a second house and then back onto Braishfield Road opposite Forge Cottage. A footpath sign confirms the route you have just used, so no trespass was committed. Isn't it a typically English thing that footpaths do sometimes take you across private gardens with complete immunity.

Back to the walk, which is nearly complete: turn right onto the road which takes you directly to the War memorial again, with the red telephone box just beyond. Now the choice of pub is yours: The Newport is on the right down Newport Lane, The Wheatsheaf is about 300 yards straight on, with the Dog & Crook about 600 yards beyond that.

NOTE ON MAPS: The OS 1:25,000 is the map for walkers. Most good stationers carry a limited supply, **Sussex Stationers** seem a pound or so cheaper than others. **Gorman's Map Centre** in Freemantle near the Shirley Road / Payne's Road junction is an OS agent that carries a very good

supply. The number of the **Romsey, Andover & Test Valley** Sheet for this walk is Explorer 131.

Note on parking: All the pubs have their own car parks and parking in Braishfield Road is unrestricted. There is also parking at the village hall, though this seems to be discouraged.

Note on buses: The only bus to Braishfield is the 35 from Romsey. Its very limited times seem designed to thwart would-be drinkers.

Note on seasons: A walk for all seasons, because it avoids the muddiest paths. The surprisingly good views from such modest elevations are all the better on a clear day.

Note on times: The complete walk is about 3¼ miles, so allowing for the moderate climb involved and stopping to admire the views, 1½ hours should suffice.