



www.fairgroundcraft.co.uk

# Weyhill and its historic Fair



Geoffrey Chaucer



## Weyhill – “The Greatest Fair in all the Land”

Then and now....imagine the sights and sounds that once crowded this very spot. Feel the ghosts of bygone pilgrims, market traders, pick-pockets, storytellers and all the colourful showmen of this ancient fair.

Weyhill Fair is featured in some of England's earliest literature. During the mid 14th century William Langland wrote 'the first true English poem' called Piers Plowman which includes these lines:

To Weyhill and Winchester I went to the fair  
With all manner of wares, as my master bade.  
And had not grace of guile gone in with my wares,  
They would have been unsold these seven years,  
so help me God!

The 'wares' traded at Weyhill Fair included livestock, food, clothing, liquor, ornaments and fancy goods. There were cures for all sorts of illnesses and sideshows of human freaks and exotic animals. The Weyhill Fair ran for three weeks in October with separate days for sheep, horses, cheese, leather and hops - but the Pleasure Fair was held every day.

Today the Weyhill Fairground Craft and Design Centre is a vibrant community of skilled artisans making and selling a variety of arts and crafts. The combination of wares and refreshments on offer provides a reminder of the historic connection of this site to its famous past.

### Geoffrey Chaucer (c1343 – 1400)

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English at the end of the 14th century. Chaucer owned the Weyhill Fair site as part of Ramridge Manor and must surely have visited the Fair on numerous occasions. The nearby Harrow Way was part of the route pilgrims used to travel to Canterbury, so some of Chaucer's tales may have been based on stories he heard at the Fair.

Imagine! The bawdy Wife of Bath from The Canterbury Tales may have stopped at the Weyhill Fair on her pilgrimage. What saucy tales would this lady have heard!



**MAN SELLS WIFE FOR 5 GUINEAS**

**Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)**

In Hardy's classic novel, the Mayor of Casterbridge put his wife up for auction and sold her to a sailor at the Weyhill Fair which was loosely disguised in the story as Weydon Priors.

Unbelievable as it now seems, selling one's wife was not unknown in those days. Indeed, a similar sale took place in nearby Andover in November 1817 apparently to the satisfaction of all parties!

### Daniel Defoe (1660 – 1731)

the author of Robinson Crusoe, lived through times of political upheaval and social unrest. He wrote numerous political pamphlets and journals but one of his most interesting books is 'A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain' (1724–26) which provided a vivid first-hand account of the state of the country on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. He visited "Weyhill, where the greatest fair of sheep is kept that this nation can show."



If you are walking The Test Way, which passes through Mottistown, you will see the main house from the northern boundary.  
www2.hants.gov.uk/longdistance/testway

## Layers of history, extensive grounds



## Did you know...

Travel anywhere in Test Valley and you'll find yourself walking through the pages of novels, children's books, travelogues and comic cartoons. Writers down the centuries have left a legacy of Test Valley landscapes, country houses and colourful local characters in their books.

Well-loved cartoons of fat little ponies and their half-pint riders were created by a well-known Test Valley resident – do you know his name?

Spot the locations where plots have been set. Test Valley can be found in the 14th century ballad of Piers Plowman right through to Thomas The Tank Engine™. Agatha Christie, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen all drew on Test Valley inspiration for their novels.

How did characters as different as James Bond and Thomas the Tank Engine™ originate, and how were they inspired by Test Valley?

Did you know the writer of some of the world's best-known books on riding, Lucinda Green, has strong connections with Andover? Or that Charlie Dimmock, popular gardening author, is from Romsey?

From Thomas Hardy to Thomas the Tank Engine™, travel through Test Valley and read between the lines.

## QUIZ: How much do you know about the literary heritage of Test Valley?

1. What is the relationship between James Bond and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang?
2. Which character was 'murdered' in Andover?
3. What is the link between Robinson Crusoe and the Weyhill Fair?
4. Which two locations were frequented by the Bloomsbury Set?
5. Which authors might have been spotted sitting in Whitchurch's White Hart Inn?
6. Who was sold for 5 guineas at the Weyhill Fair?
7. Where might a walker hear the ghost of Thomas?
8. Whose initials are carved into a garden wall at Rookery Farm?
9. Whose cartoons feature fat, mischievous ponies?
10. Which famous author wrote a poem about a 'housewife'?

Published September 2013.

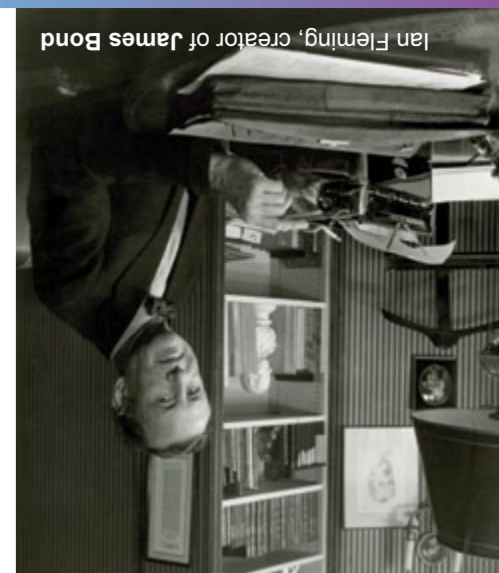
You'll find all the answers in this pamphlet.

DID YOU KNOW that Ian Fleming also wrote the children's adventure 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' featuring a magical car? A British musical loosely based on the novel was made in 1968 with a script by Roald Dahl and starring Dick Van Dyke.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mottistown  
www.ianfleming.com  
One of their guests was Ian Fleming (1908 – 1964) with whom Maud had a love affair and long friendship. Maud was involved in secret intelligence work during World War II and it's just possible that she introduced Fleming to this clandestine world. He joined Naval Intelligence and went on to create the world's most famous spy, James Bond, through his internationally renowned series of novels.

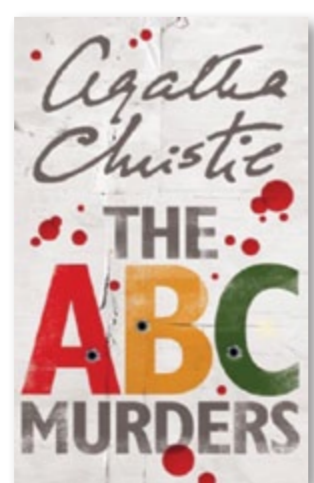
During the first half of the 20th century, the Abbey provided an out-of-town setting for the love affairs and intrigues of the Bloomsbury Set, a hugely influential group of English writers, artists and free-thinkers. The owners, Maud and Gilbert Russell, were wealthy patrons of the Arts and made Mottistown the centre of a fashionable artistic and political circle.

Romantic secrets of Mottistown Abbey  
If walls could speak, what stories would the stones of this gloriously romantic 13th century Augustine Abbey reveal?



# Literary Test Valley

Discover the characters and explore the settings



### Agatha Christie (1890 – 1976)

based one of her most famous novels 'The ABC Murders' in Andover. The 'A' in the title stands for Andover where Alice Ascher was murdered and 78 High Street was used for the filming of the Hercule Poirot TV version.

Agatha Christie was a hugely successful author. Her novels have sold roughly four billion copies.



# Literary Test Valley: places and attractions to discover and explore

## William Cobbett (1763 – 1835)

travel writer, political commentator and author of 'Rural Rides' was a frequent visitor to Rookery Farmhouse in Hurstbourne Tarrant. His writings mention visits all around Test Valley and his initials are still visible, carved into a brick garden wall at the farm.



## Norman Thelwell (1923 – 2004)

settled in Timsbury. He is best known for his cartoons of small, pig-tailed girls perched precariously on top of fat, mischievous ponies. However, these were just part of his creative achievements as he had been selling drawings and cartoons since the age of 15. A fine draughtsman, Norman Thelwell placed many of his figures in naturalistic settings depicting aspects of English country life such as riding, fishing, sailing and motoring.

One cartoon shows a queue of traffic over a bridge under which a walker is cheerfully trekking down a disused railway line. He must have got his inspiration from the former Sprat and Winkle Line, stretches of which form part of the 44 mile long Test Way.



*This little bag, I hope, will prove  
To be not vainly made;  
For should you thread and needles want,  
It will afford you aid.*

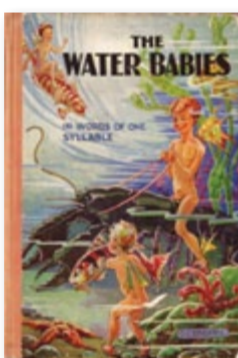
*And, as we are about to part,  
T'll serve another end:  
For, when you look upon this bag,  
You'll recollect your friend.*



## Waterbabies, judges and rabbits at the White Hart Inn, Whitchurch

### The Rev. Charles Kingsley (1819 – 1875)

stayed at the White Hart Inn on a fishing holiday. He was Rector of nearby Eversley, but was best known for writing 'The Waterbabies' a mainstay of British children's literature for many decades.



Jane loved visiting this quiet corner of Hampshire, and wove the experiences of staying with her extended family and the characters she met into her novels.

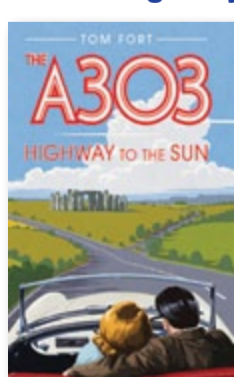
Jane would still recognise many of the houses and farms in the Bourne Valley. For a true Jane Austen experience follow Jane's footsteps through north Hampshire's picturesque countryside, stop at one of the many old inns that Jane must have visited on her walks and visit Andover's market (Thursdays and Saturdays) just as Jane herself loved to do. The Inkpen to Hurstbourne Tarrant stretch of the Test Way covers eight miles and passes through Ibthorpe.

**Lord Denning (1899 – 1999)** the most celebrated English judge of the 20th century was born above his father's drapers shop just across the road from the White Hart. His last home was 'The Lawn' in Whitchurch which houses his collection of legal books.

**Richard Adams**, author of Watership Down, celebrated his 80th birthday at the White Hart Inn in Whitchurch.

## 'A303: Highway to the Sun'

is Tom Fort's hugely entertaining narrative of this time-honoured route across Test Valley. Guaranteed to brighten and enlighten your journey.



## Ibthorpe House

Fine Grade II listed Queen Anne house set in idyllic hamlet. Frequently visited by Jane Austen and writers associated with the Bloomsbury Set. [www.ibthorpemanorfarm.com](http://www.ibthorpemanorfarm.com) [www.hbt.org.uk](http://www.hbt.org.uk)

## The Weyhill Fairground Craft and Design Centre

Craft shops, art gallery, fresh produce market, restaurant. Contact individual studios for opening days. [www.fairgroundcraft.co.uk](http://www.fairgroundcraft.co.uk)

**Historic Michaelmas Fair:** showpiece for traditional country crafts usually held the last weekend in September.



## Stockbridge

Unique High Street where trout swim beside the pavement. Extra wide (originally stock-keeping) main street famous for galleries, gifts and great food.

Perfectly located for exploring surrounding countryside on foot or, like H.G. Wells, by bike. 'Test Valley Tour': a series of 30 circular walking/cycling tracks. 'Test Way Off-Road Cycle Trail' between Stockbridge and Stoney Marsh.

## Mottisfont Abbey

Popular National Trust attraction set amid historic gardens sweeping down to River Test. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mottisfont](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mottisfont) Open for visitors 7 days a week from 11am to 5pm (4pm in November and December).

## Romsey

Historic market town dominated by its magnificent Norman Abbey. Home to gardening author, Charlie Dimmock. Impressive gardens on display at the world famous Sir Harold Hillier Garden and Arboretum at Ampfield, and romantic cottage-style Houghton Lodge and Gardens near Stockbridge as lovingly depicted by Jane Austin. [www3.hants.gov.uk/hilliergardens](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/hilliergardens) [www.houghtonlodge.co.uk](http://www.houghtonlodge.co.uk)

**Key**  
— The Test Way  
— Sprat and Winkle Line



## Whitchurch

The White Hart Inn with window seat perfect for watching the world go by. Whitchurch Silk Mill: Britain's oldest working silk mill. [www.whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk](http://www.whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk)

Scenic walking route from dismantled railway line, through thatched village of St Mary Bourne to Test Way at Longparish. [www3.hants.gov.uk/test-way](http://www3.hants.gov.uk/test-way)

## 'A303: Highway to the Sun'

The book that put the A303 on the map!



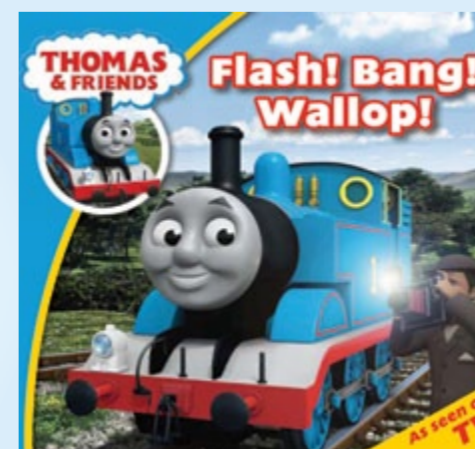
## Andover

Setting for Agatha Christie's fictional murder (The ABC Murders). The Angel Inn dates back to 1445. Museum of the Iron Age: life-like displays of nearby Danebury Hill fort. Market days: Thursday and Saturday.

## Ampfield

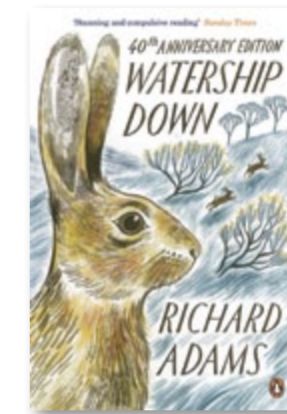
Thomas the Tank Engine™ originated in Ampfield Vicarage. Fine network of countryside walks ranging from one mile to 18 mile Keble Way. Contact Dave Biddlecombe at [dave@biddleco.freemove.co.uk](mailto:dave@biddleco.freemove.co.uk) for information on Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area. [www.ampfield.org.uk](http://www.ampfield.org.uk)

Meet Thomas and his friends at a steam day in Alresford on the Mid Hants Railway known as the Watercress Line. [www.dayoutwiththomas.co.uk](http://www.dayoutwiththomas.co.uk)



## 'Watership Down'

Just north of Whitchurch are clues to the characters that inspired this book. Look out for rolling downland of close-cropped grass and the word 'warren' in local place names. Whitchurch author, Richard Adams, wrote his most famous book Watership Down in 1972. It is one of Penguin Books' best-selling novels and has never been out of print.



Although numerous reviewers have claimed this story of a small group of rabbits is some sort of spiritual allegory, Richard himself maintains that he simply wrote down a story that he'd told his young daughters.

## H.G. Wells (1866 – 1946)

based an episode of his comic novel, The Wheels of Chance, in Stockbridge. In this story of an 1895 cycling holiday, Mr Hoopdriver heroically defends the honour of his travelling companion in the Grosvenor Hotel, Stockbridge, which is loosely disguised in the novel as Wallenstock. The Grosvenor Hotel straddles the pavement in the centre of Stockbridge's historic High Street and hosts the famous Houghton Fishing Club.



## Thomas the Tank Engine™

has his home in Test Valley. In the 19th century the vicar of Ampfield built a huge train set that ran through the vicarage gardens. He encouraged his own and local school children to watch the trains as they ran through a tunnel and past platforms on the 40 yards of track. His son grew up to become Reverend Wilbert Awdry OBE (1911 – 1997) and, like his father, developed a lifelong passion for steam engines. Wilbert built a toy engine for his own son and wrote some initial Thomas the Tank Engine™ tales to go with the toy. Stories of this cheeky little engine are now loved by children the world over.

A few miles west of Ampfield lies the now disused Sprat and Winkle railway line which once connected Redbridge to Andover. Long sections of the track can be walked on the Test Way. Stand under one of the bridges and listen carefully. You may hear the ghost of Thomas or one of his friends chuff-chuffing down the line.

**Charlie Dimmock** lives in Romsey. This well-known gardening expert and TV presenter has shared her knowledge and skills in gardening books such as 'Enjoy your Garden' and the 'Ground Force' series.

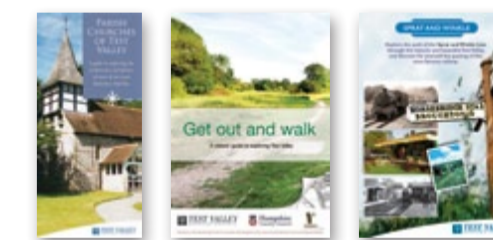


Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

## Test Valley Poetry Trails

are marked by small plaques discreetly placed in Andover, Stockbridge and Romsey that capture the spirit and beauty of Test Valley in verse. You can follow the Andover poetry trails through the town and along the River Anton. In Stockbridge, follow the trail down the High Street and along the River Test. In Romsey the trail runs past King John's House through Romsey War Memorial Park and along the River Test.

A variety of publications welcoming visitors can be found on the Council's website at: [www.testvalley.gov.uk/tourism](http://www.testvalley.gov.uk/tourism)



## Credits and acknowledgements

Without the support of the following individuals and organisations this leaflet would not have been produced.

David Rymill, Archivist Hampshire Records Office. Liz Hallett and the Awdry Family for photographs of the Reverend W Awdry. David Thelwell for the images of Norman Thelwell. Artwork reproduced with the permission of Ian Fleming Publications Ltd & The Ian Fleming Estate © Ian Fleming Estate 1961. [www.ianfleming.com](http://www.ianfleming.com). The Christie Archive for images of Agatha Christie. John Jervoise and The Herriard Estate for images of Chaucer from the Herriard Collection (HRO 44U69/K7/13). Andrew Flanagan, Wherwell History Group. Brynley Evans, Hurstbourne Tarrant. Erica Tinsley, Andover History and Archaeology Group. Christopher Coffin, Andover Quaker Group. John Isterwood, Andover Kieren Phelan. [www.homesteadbb.free-online.co.uk](http://www.homesteadbb.free-online.co.uk) (Hampshire Pubs and Inns with a literary Connection). Fairground Craft and Design Centre, Weyhill. Wife of Bath, The Florida Centre for Instructional Technology. Copywriter, Sue Mowforth.