



Circular walking guide to Winchester station

Follow in poet Keats' footsteps and discover some of the wonders of Winchester

Winchester suited the poet John Keats (1795-1821) perfectly. He appreciated its ancient centre, the calm of the Close, the swift water of the River Itchen and the healthy air from the surrounding Downs. On this walk, we follow in his footsteps to St Cross, through the landscape that inspired him to write "Ode to Autumn" and the opening lines: "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun; Conspiring with him how to load and bless, With fruit the vines that round the thatched-eaves run." Passing the city's ancient landmarks, this walk includes a visit to the cathedral, Winchester College and Wolvesey Castle, then crosses the Water Meadows to the Hospital of St Cross, built "for those who once had everything about them but suffered losses". Sheltered accommodation is still provided for 25 elderly gentlemen, who wear a uniform of black or red cloaks, and wayfarers can claim the "dole" - a mug of beer and a morsel of bread.

Leave Winchester train station and follow the green signs opposite, downhill to the city centre via the Theatre Royal and along Jewry Street. Turn left into the High Street pedestrian zone. The tourist information office is at the bottom of the High Street in the Guildhall, just before King Alfred's statue.

Take a right at Market Street to reach the cathedral, which has its origins in the seventh century, where you can see the memorials to Jane Austen, the grave of Izaak Walton, father of anglers, and St Swithun's shrine. The singing of evensong by the cathedral choir takes place daily (call 01962 857200 for times).

Exit the cathedral and turn left through the archway to walk across the Close. On your left, you will pass a Barbara Hepworth sculpture, Homage to Mondrian, and the Pilgrims' School, from where you may see the choristers filing into the cathedral. Ahead is Cheyney Court. Leave by St Swithun's Gate to your right and turn left, following the green signs through Kingsgate. The church above is worth visiting - it featured as St Cuthbert's in Anthony Trollope's novel *The Warden*.

Turn left into College Street. Straight ahead, on the corner of Kingsgate Road and Canon Street, is the excellent Wykeham Arms (no children under 14 or mobile phones allowed; good pies served). At 8 College Street - now a private house - a plaque reads "In this house Jane Austen lived her last days."

Next, you'll pass the entrance to Winchester College, one of the oldest English public schools, founded by Bishop William of Wykeham. Guided one-hour tours are available, and are the only way to see the college, including its 14th-century chapel, Wren's 17th-century schoolroom, the Scholars' Dining Room and the cloisters.

At the end of College Street, on the left, are the ruins of Wolvesey Castle, the Old Bishop's Palace, where Mary I and Philip of Spain had their wedding breakfast in 1554. Turn right into College Walk, following the "St Cross via the Meadows" sign, then right again at the end, before turning left on to the path across the Water Meadows. The River Itchen and St Catherine's Hill, an Iron Age fort, will soon appear on your left.

Continue along the bank of the chalk stream and, if you look carefully, you'll spot trout in the fast current. You'll also see Winchester College's pristine cricket pitches and playing fields. Follow this path until you reach Garnier Road, cross and continue on to St Cross Hospital, in its picturesque location at the edge of the Meadows.

Admission fee to permit entry to its Grade I buildings and the Almshouses of Noble Poverty. The Brethren's Hall and church are worth seeing, too. As you are arriving on foot, you are entitled to ask for your dole of beer and bread at the Porter's Lodge. Retrace the route back to the city centre.