

**DISCOVER**



# EGHAM HYTHE HISTORY WALK



*Former Egham Hythe Community  
Primary School Building Built 1884*

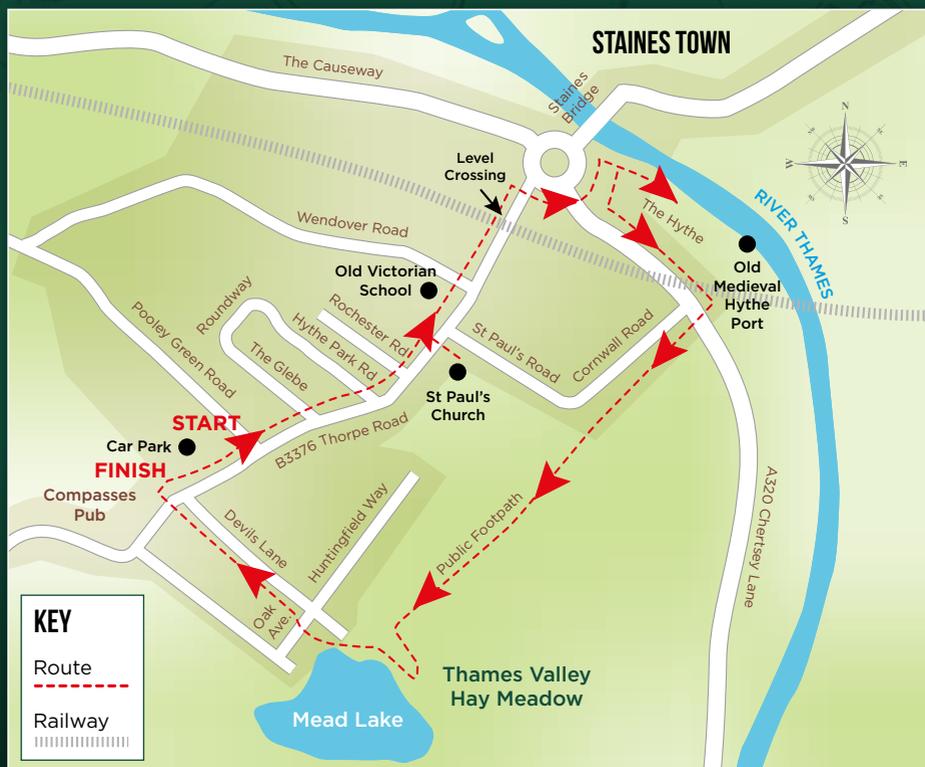
**FROM FROGS ISLAND, TO THE FORMER  
ROMAN HYTHE PORT AND RETURNING  
VIA THE LAST REMAINING THAMES  
VALLEY HAY MEADOW IN SURREY**

# EGHAM HYTHE HISTORY WALK

## INTRODUCTION



This walk can be a short walk to the former Hythe Port and back, or you can continue and walk the entire route which will take you around an hour. The shorter walk will take around 30 minutes. Both walks are mostly on pavement/footpaths. Please wear appropriate walking shoes and clothing for the weather. The longer walk includes an isolated footpath to and from the Hay Meadow. We recommend you walk with a friend along this part of the walk and always carry a mobile phone please.



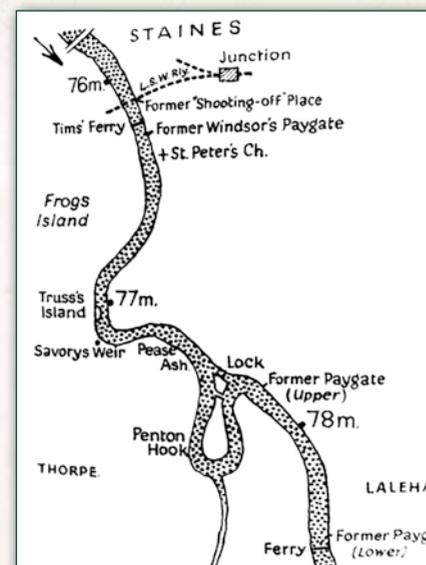
Map of the Area showing the trail. Not to scale.

## START OF WALK



Pooley Green pay and display car park in Thorpe Lea Road (B3376), TW20 8HA.

## FROGS ISLAND



You are standing in Frogs Island (please see the map to the left from the Thames Highway by Fred Thacker 1920). The second and third generation of residents here are known as 'Froggies' and the Frogs Island Fair is held annually on the last Saturday in May to commemorate Frogs Island and its history.

The first reference we could find to Frogs Island was in the 1860s when three new beer houses, which became pubs, appeared along Thorpe Lea Road. One pub has now closed, but The Compasses and the Robin Hood are still in business and you can visit these pubs at the end of the walk.

Froggies will tell you that the name Frogs Island came from the huge number of frogs in the ditches around the green where the car park is located. There was a large pond at the other end of the green, which is reputed to hold a traction engine. The area remained sparsely populated until the end of the Victorian age due to flooding. You are also standing on part of the Thames Basin, which still floods from time to time. The last flood was in 2014/15 and a Flood Anthology book on residents experiences was produced by Royal Holloway University of London in 2018. Copies can be obtained from the Pop Inn Café, in the Pooley Green Shopping Parade and Egham Museum.

Walk out of the car park using the pedestrian walk way, towards the Pooley Green Shopping Parade. The Pop Inn Café has a number of FREE historic leaflets and information, so if you want to stop off before or after the walk for a cup of tea/coffee please do!

Please cross the busy road with care using the traffic islands. Walk past the bus stop and continue walking straight ahead

As you walk along on your left you will see a pair of semi-detached houses built in 1905 named St Ann's View with a balcony next to each bedroom, one balcony retains its stone cat. In 1905 the housing estate opposite did not exist and you could see across open fields to St Ann's Hill where Charles James Fox lived. Charles James Fox was a famous politician who campaigned for human rights, such as anti-slavery, and he has a very elaborate monument next to his grave in Westminster Abbey. There is also a statue of Charles James Fox in Bloomsbury Square London. If you would like to know more about this local great man please see the Runnymede Sculpture Trail leaflet available from the Pop Inn Café. You will be able to glimpse St Ann's Hill at the back of the estate later on in the walk. There is a wooded park on top of St Ann's Hill with a small car park off St Ann's Hill Road.

The first road you cross over is Glebe Road - the word Glebe means church land used to support a priest/clergyman. The word originates from Medieval times. This area is likely to have been fields leased out by the church and could have been worked on by peasants known as 'serfs'.

As you cross Hythe Park Road you will see the mix of houses are late Victorian and early Twentieth Century housing characteristic of the area as a result of the railway being built in the 1850s. This attracted builders who started building pockets of housing for people who worked at the gravel pits, in industry or retail in and around Staines.

Continue along the pavement and walk past a zebra crossing and the current Hythe Community Primary School. Next to the existing school is the Victorian school building opened in 1884. There were two separate single sex schools on the site.



*Children from Egham Hythe Primary School Infants Class, 1926/27. Image Credit: John Derbyshire*

In September 1996 the original Victorian school buildings were closed and redeveloped into flats and houses. Please cross over the road at the traffic light controlled crossing, and walk into the grounds of St Paul's Church.

## 'CATHEDRAL OF THE GRAVEL PITS' - ST PAUL'S CHURCH

St Paul's Church was built during the years 1930/31, with the financial help of Edward Budgen a local grocer. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century the local population increased to around 4,000 people as local industry developed, for example gravel pit extraction, the Lagonda factory and gas works on the otherside of the level crossing, resulting in the need for a larger church. Edward Budgen also purchased the church organ in 1936. There is still a Budgen store in Egham, which is now part of a national Budgen supermarket chain. The church's only stained glass window was fitted in 1962 through a donation by the vicar's warden, Mr Moody. The current church hall was built in 1957.



*St Paul's Church, Egham Hythe - [www.speh.org.uk](http://www.speh.org.uk)*

The copper steeple of St Paul's could be seen for miles along the River Thames and the surrounding area when there were no high buildings in the area. This was a time when the area was full of gravel extraction pits, and thus St Paul's was given the local name 'Cathedral of the Gravel Pits'.

Gravel extraction became a thriving industry which, by the 1960s, saw 25% of the country's production originate from these Surrey pits. When the gravel became too difficult to extract, many such as the Egham pits, were filled in, whilst others, such as those at Thorpe Park and Penton Hook were converted into leisure sites. Over the years, the extraction of gravel at these pits has uncovered some truly remarkable finds, such as a bronze shield, the only Iron Age bronze shield (450 - 250 BC) ever to have been found in Britain or Europe. The bronze shield is now in the British Museum, but other Bronze Age gravel pit finds such as the axe, basin and sword are in Chertsey Museum.



*Image Credit: Runnymede Borough Council*

Please walk out of St Paul's Church entrance and continue down the main road towards the railway crossing. Cross the level crossing with care and at the end of the industrial estate buildings take the small footpath to the right. Head down to the traffic controlled pedestrian crossing, and cross the road turning left towards Staines Bridge. Where the roundabout is located, there used to be a Druid stone circle. Continue towards Staines Bridge and you will find a coal post.

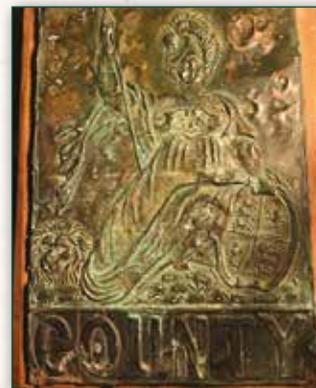


*Image Credit: Runnymede Borough Council*

The coal & wine tax post was erected here in 1861. Most of the posts were as a result of the London Coal & Wine Duties Continuance Act of 1861. The coal posts extended out from London for around 12 to 18 miles. The posts were the site for the collection of taxes for the Corporation of London, from coal and wine cargo passing these points. This paid for building parts of the City of London and bridges over the River Thames, and by the 1870s to free from toll a number of bridges over

the Thames, including Kingston, Hampton Court, Walton-on-Thames and Staines bridges. There were originally about 280 coal posts in total and 211 still exist today. All the coal posts are Grade II listed.

Please walk past the coal post, and turn right down the road named 'The Hythe', you are now in the former Roman Hythe Port. This was an important crossing point for the Romans from Londinium to Silchester (Silchester is North of Basingstoke. The remains of the Roman Walls and Amphitheatre at Silchester are owned by English Heritage and are open to the public). The Roman road is named the Devil's Highway, which passes along the route you have followed from Frogs Island. The row of cottages on your left date from the 1700s and have a special sign on the walls to show they have paid their insurance and are eligible for a fire engine. These cottages were probably for people with occupations on the Thames. There are 24 buildings in the Hythe that are Grade II nationally listed, including the historic Swan Hotel and Boleyn Hotel (formerly the Anne Boleyn Hotel).



*Insurance plaques high up on the walls of some of the cottages in the former Hythe Port. Image Credit: Claire Dawson*



Just before the cottages is a path down to the Thames alongside a plot of land that residents are transforming to create 'The Hythe Habitat'. This will provide a managed 'natural habitat' for wildlife as well as to be enjoyed by the general public. Walk down the steps and turn left under Staines Bridge and onto the Thames Path. The Thames Path enables you to walk or cycle to Windsor, or even onto Oxford. Immediately turn around and go back under Staines Bridge and back up the steps to walk further into the former Hythe Port to look at the historic buildings.

Henry VIII started courting Anne Boleyn in 1528 and used the royal barge to take Anne Boleyn to Windsor Castle. Parts of the Anne Boleyn Hotel date back to the 16th century, when the Hythe was a busy Medieval port. Henry and Anne would clandestinely meet during Anne's stays in Staines. Anne Boleyn married Henry VIII in January 1533 and was Queen of England until she was beheaded in 1536. Queen Anne gave birth to the future Elizabeth I on the 7th September 1533.



*The Swan Inn on the banks of the River Thames, at The Hythe (photo by Chloe Alexander)*

Another famous visitor was Samuel Pepys the diarist, who is reputed to have visited the Swan Inn.

Most of the buildings in the former port were built in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, and the area is classed as a conservation area. The heyday of the port was during the 17th Century with the increasing use of barges for transporting goods such as coal, sugar, barley and oats. In 1791-6 a new stone bridge was built with inadequate foundations and parts of the bridge can be seen on the river bank, next to Ye Olde Bridge Cottage, (which was also the toll house for the stone bridge). Replacement bridges also failed in flood waters and the site of the bridge was moved to its present site in 1827 when

construction started on George Rennie's three arched granite bridge, completed in 1832. This re-location of the bridge and its traffic has enabled the preservation of the former port area as a quiet spot full of history.



*Image Credit: Runnymede Borough Council*

**For the short version of this walk, after a meander around the former port of Hythe, please re-trace your steps back to the pay and display car park at Pooley Green.**

**For the longer version of the walk please continue as follows:**



*Image Credit: Runnymede Borough Council*

Please walk back up The Hythe. After the Jolly Farmer pub please turn left, into Farmers Road. Continue to the very end of Farmers Road, on the right you will find a small alley, which brings you out to the bus stop next to the pedestrian traffic controlled crossing. Do not cross the road but turn left from the alley and walk along the main road under the railway bridge. You will see a traffic

island ahead. Please walk past the traffic island and continue along the pavement. When you are opposite the wooden entrance shown in the photograph above, please carefully cross the main road to access the public footpath on the other side of the wooden stile.

Please walk through the wooden stile on to a footpath by a field and at the back of the estate. You are now walking parallel with the Devil's Highway. If you look left over the fields you will see the Stealth Roller Coaster at Thorpe Park and St Ann's Hill in the distance. Where the houses have been built there used to be fields owned by Mr Goring. Mr Goring raised cattle for his butchers shop in Staines, and owned houses on Frogs Island for his staff. One resident recalls his father working for Mr Goring and living in a tithe house. At the end of the field boundary is a metal stile, please walk through. You are now in a remnant of the very rural area that was characteristic of Egham Hythe, you may even see some sheep in the paddock on the right. Follow the footpath and then turn left through another stile.



On this path you will notice the willows, which formed the basis of a major industry along the River Thames. Willow was very versatile and used for ladders, poles for hop vines, hurdles, small casks and fruit baskets. The willows in this area tend to be the crack willow (latin name: salix fragilis) variety. It is one of Britain's largest willows and used in the past to make small sailing boats. A hybrid of the crack and white willow is the cricket bat willow, to make cricket bats.

Image Credit:  
Runnymede Borough Council

At the end of this section of path is another metal gate. Please turn left and you will find yourself on a narrower path that takes you to the very rare Thames Basin hay meadow. You will walk past Mead Lake on your right.

## THAMES VALLEY HAY MEADOW

At the end of the track you will see a wooden footpath sign, this is the hay meadow, and is the last remaining Thames Valley hay meadow in Surrey.

The meadow is an area of Special Scientific Interest and is surrounded by ancient hedgeland. The best time to see the meadow is from May to August.

This small reserve contains some very rare plant species including downy-fruited sedge (*Carex filiformis*) a nationally rare plant. Some 157 plant species have been recorded and include meadow cranesbill, clustered bell-flower, cowslip, hoary plantain, salad burnet and lady's bedstraw.



Image Credits: Runnymede Borough Council

Lady's Bedstraw was used in Medieval Times to dye clothes yellow from the flowers and red from the roots. This plant has the smell of new-mown hay and was used in Medieval times to fill mattresses. It is also an important food source for the caterpillars of the broad bordered bee hawk moth.

Re-trace your steps out of the meadow and back on to the track. Go past Mead Lake and continue straight ahead, you will pass through a metal gate that takes up the entire width of the track. Continue walking ahead and you will need to cross a housing estate road named Huntingfield Way, the track you are now on is Devils Lane. Continue to the end and it will bring you to the Compasses and Robin Hood pubs.



The Compasses Pub at the top of Devils Lane.  
Image Credit: Runnymede Borough Council

Please cross the road with care to where The Compasses and the Robin Hood pubs are located and turn right. You are now on the Thorpe Lea Road B3376 and the public pay and display car park is just ahead of you.

END OF WALK



## DISCOVER



If you are interested in history you may wish to see the historic displays in Chertsey and Egham Museums:



### CHERTSEY MUSEUM

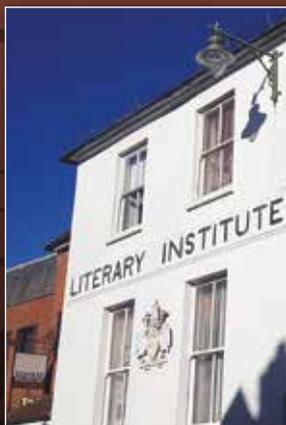


The Cedars, 33 Windsor Street,  
Chertsey KT16 8AT

**Telephone:** 01932 565764

**Website:** [www.chertseymuseum.org](http://www.chertseymuseum.org)

**Opening Times:** Tuesday to Friday from  
12.30 pm to 4.30pm and on Saturday from  
11am to 4pm.



### EGHAM MUSEUM



Literary Institute, 51 High Street,  
Egham TW20 9EW

**Telephone:** 01784 434483

**Website:** [www.eghammuseum.org](http://www.eghammuseum.org)

**Opening Times:** Tuesdays and Thursdays  
between 10am and 4.30pm and on Saturdays  
between 10.30am and 12.30pm. Additional  
opening times are available by appointment.