



Great Missenden Roald Dahl's village

Distance: 7½ km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: Chilterns

Date written: 27-sep-2021

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Refreshments: Little Kingshill, Great Missenden

Map: Explorer 181, 172 (Chiltern Hills) *but the maps in this guide suffice*

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Woodland trails, cosy pub, easy field paths, views, parkland, country village

In Brief

This guide takes you around “the most affluent place in England”. But you won't see a lot of mansions. It's the general surroundings that are so appealing: the beechwoods, the gentle hills, a country pub, an ancient church. The village (really a little town) has those narrow streets and cute shops, but it's not a tourist area (although you will be made extremely welcome!) – just a fine place to walk. Choosing from among the many footpaths available, this walk give you a taste of the woods and the hills, returning through the most interesting part of the (little) town. Best of all perhaps, you can come by train!



One writer who chose to live here was Roald Dahl and this walk takes in many of the places where he must have walked, whilst dreaming up a new hilarious story. You can see his grave near the end of the walk. For refreshments, there is a well-situated country pub half-way round.



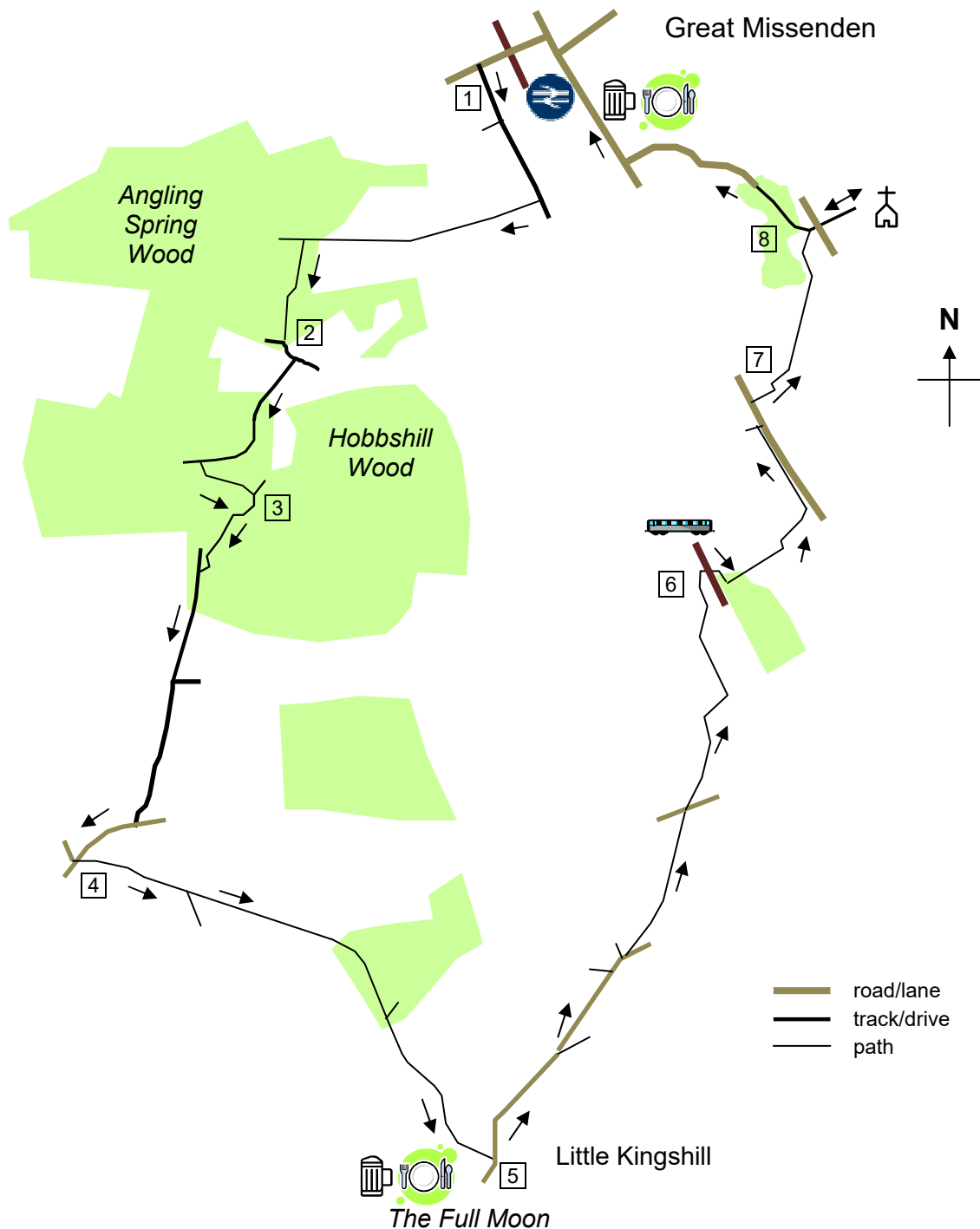
The paths are almost all wide and clear, but in one or two places you can't easily avoid brushing against some nettles, so shorts are probably not advisable. The terrain was fine for sensible shoes or trainers but in wet conditions it's easy to imagine that you might need boots. With **no stiles** and **no main roads**, this walk is perfect for your dog too.



The walk begins in **Great Missenden**, Buckinghamshire, either at the station or in one of the car parks: www.w3w.co/arrives.announced.clocked, postcode **HP16 0AU**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk


Great Missenden appeared in the Norman Domesday Book of 1086. The “den” in the name is obviously “valley” (“dene”) but the probable meaning of “Missen” was revealed by one of the greatest experts on the English language and its placenames – and he was Swedish! Professor Eilert Ekwall linked it to an obsolete word for a marsh plant which has relatives in other languages. The River Misbourne has the same derivation. A report in *The Guardian* 2019 put Great Missenden in the list of “Britain’s richest villages”, citing its “ancient churches, beechwoods, deep valleys, rolling Chiltern Hills, higgledy-piggledy streets”. As well as author Roald Dahl and his descendants, other well-known people who enjoyed living in this small country town have been Labour prime ministers Clement Atlee and Harold Wilson and writer John Le Carré.




The walk begins near the **railway station of Great Missenden**.

If you arrived by train from the London area, take the exit on that side, leading up to the road and immediately turn **left** and **left** again, doubling back, on Trafford Road, a private drive.

If you began in a car park, e.g. off Link Road, walk into the town, go **right** and **left** at two mini-roundabouts, signed *Wycombe, Prestwood*, up over the railway, and turn **left** on Trafford Road, a private drive.

-  1 Trafford Road is also signed as a public footpath. Walk 120m (that's nearly 150 yards in English measure) and, just after *Firswood*, at a little 3-way signpost, turn **right** on a track. As you go through a small metal gate, a landscape has opened up. Follow the left-hand side of this large sloping meadow (a popular walk for dogs of every imaginable breed). At the other side, a disused kissing-gate leads into ancient Angling Spring Wood, a blaze of bluebells in late spring.

You must come again to Angling Spring Wood after this glancing visit. There is a free "talking tree trail" voiced by eleven well-known actors, and carved posts at each tree or landmark. One is the Witches' Tree which inspired Roald Dahl to write "Fantastic Mr Fox", during one of his walks from his home in Gypsy House. If you have a picture of his "Horrible little Slugs", those could have come from this wood which has some rare specimens.

-  Turn immediately **left** on a path uphill close to the edge. The path diverts a little from the edge to skirt an old quarry and continues close to a wire fence on your left. At the top you emerge onto a bridleway at a bend. Turn **left** here to enjoy views across the valley, quickly coming to a T-junction with a tarmac lane. (Roald Dahl's house, *Gypsy House*, is 500m left on the lane, but not on your route. It is not open to the public.)

- 2 Turn **right** on the drive and, at the end of the tarmac, keep ahead on a dusty wooded byway with plantations of various trees on each side. After 200m the byway curves right and, in another 100m, you see a small metal gate on your right. **Ignore** this metal gate but immediately opposite it, turn **left** through a metal-and-wood swing-gate into Hobbshill Wood, next to a "walkers welcome" sign. (Most walkers stay on the byway: this little diversion takes you through a spectacular Chiltern beechwood to extend your "woodland experience" just a little longer.) Keep to the left side, soon on a fine path downhill under beeches. In 150m, after a few twists, your path comes down to a T-junction with a footpath, recognised from the familiar Bucks yellow arrow on a post. Turn sharp **right** on this footpath through more of the wood.

- 3 This footpath descends to take you through a small metal gate and then leads up through an ash wood. After 200m on this footpath, at the top, go through a small metal gate and turn **left**, once again on the wide byway. In 250m the byway ends at a tarmac drive. Avoid the tree avenue on your left which leads to Sedges Farm and instead keep **right** on the drive, leading down to a road, *Nags Head Lane*. (This road really does lead to the inn of that name, but in the other direction) Turn **right** on this road as far as the top of a slope, 150m, where the road name changes to Peterley Lane at a road junction.

- 4 Turn **left** at the junction onto a farm drive and keep **left** round the side of the buildings, through a small metal gate, to follow a grass path that curves right. Your path runs along the left-hand side of a large crop field. About

250m from the road you reach a small signpost on the edge of the field, with two fingers pointing across the field. Follow the **second** arrow, a direction which is only a little to the right of the path you were on, but across the crop field. (In September the field was bare but in high summer you will have a clear route through the cereal crop.) Your destination is a post with a white marker. When you finally reach the post, you find yourself in the far corner of the field. Go through a metal kissing-gate here and keep ahead on a rather narrow and bendy path through trees and thickets of Sandwich Wood. When you emerge from the wood, keep straight ahead on a knobbly path beside a sheep pasture on your right. The footpath finally comes out precisely in front of the *Full Moon* pub in Little Kingshill.



The Full Moon is an excellent spot to be out-of-doors, with a throng of tables in the front area and, in summer, a tent. Beer is Marlow and several others to wash down quite an extensive menu, including asparagus quiche, crayfish cocktail, and frickles (a US idea consisting mainly of a deep-fried gherkin) and, for mains, kedgeree, mussels and some pub favourites (but no snozzcumbers or frobscottles). It may be an idea to ring (01494-862397) or book online, because the pub has been known to close for a private function.

- 5 After your break, turn **left** immediately outside the pub on a residential road. In 250m, take the **left** fork between white gates, a prim and pleasant private straight road with leafy housing on both sides. After 250m the road elbows right. **Leave** the road here by crossing straight over to a narrow signed footpath running between hedges and garden fences in an upmarket area known as *Wychwood Rise*. In 300m or so you reach a road, *Nags Head Lane* again. Cross straight over onto a narrow footpath opposite. This footpath rises to a wooden gate, taking you into a wild meadow. The clear path straight ahead leads through scrubland, curving right and left into a narrower natural meadow, turning diagonally right to pass under a large oak tree. You are now in another smaller meadow with the railway line close on your right.
- 6 Only 50m after that large oak, turn **right** under the railway. (This path is unsigned and easy to miss: if you meet a low fence with *no stile* leading into the next field, you have come 50m too far.) Your path turns right again and sharp left to run around the boundary of *Misbourne School*. It zigzags and reaches a corner near the main road. Ignore a small metal gate on the right here and turn **left**, staying beside the playing field. You cross over a new tarmac entrance to come out through a metal kissing-gate. Cross the main road here and turn **left** on the footway on other side for 50m to a sign for the *South Bucks Way*.
- 7 Turn **right** at the sign on a wide track, through a black kissing-gate, into a broad area of parkland known as *Abbey Park*. Only 15m after the gate, go **left** through another black kissing-gate, turning right over a humped foot-bridge over Warren Water, a swollen part of the River Misbourne, with *Missenden Abbey* (now part of a college) on view in the distance. Exit through another black kissing-gate. (Not strictly necessary – but it was fun, eh?) Now take a path across the park that goes diagonally **left** (i.e. avoiding the path sharp left which heads towards the abbey). As you walk, the sound of traffic from the A413 trunk road becomes more noticeable on your right. At the top, your path goes under trees and finally leads through a small wooden gate and up steps to a tarmac drive. Your direction is **left** on the drive, but first everyone who reaches this point will want to turn **right**

across the bridge over the truck road, the short distance to the church (or even beyond to explore Chalkdell Wood Nature Reserve).

*The focus of the great church of St Peter and St Paul is that massive tower whose 14-foot-thick walls have to support the five bells that were moved from Missenden Abbey after the Dissolution (later replaced by **six** bells from various dates). The present-day structure dates from the early 1300s but the tower and walls were greatly extended in later centuries. The interior is full of memorials and stained glass.*

One of the graves in the lush green churchyard on the north side is that of children's writer Roald Dahl. To find it, head for a large circular seat round a tree. The grave is just before the seat, to the left of it. Like many of these lovingly-tended graves, it always has fresh flowers.

*Roald Dahl was born in 1916 in Wales to Norwegian immigrant parents who named him in honour of Roald Amundsen the polar explorer. While at Repton School, his dream of inventing a new kind of chocolate bar was later realised in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory". But before he became a children's author, Roald Dahl was an intelligence officer (i.e. a "spy") and a fighter pilot, injured when his plane crashed in the desert. In 1954 he moved into the Gipsy House in Great Missenden and lived there till his death in 1990. He was also the author of, *Matilda*, *The BFG*, *the Twits*, *the Witches* and many other children's books. He loved inventing new words, such as *flushbunking* and *scrumdiddlyumptious*. He also wrote *Tales of the Unexpected*, some screenplays and novels for older readers.*

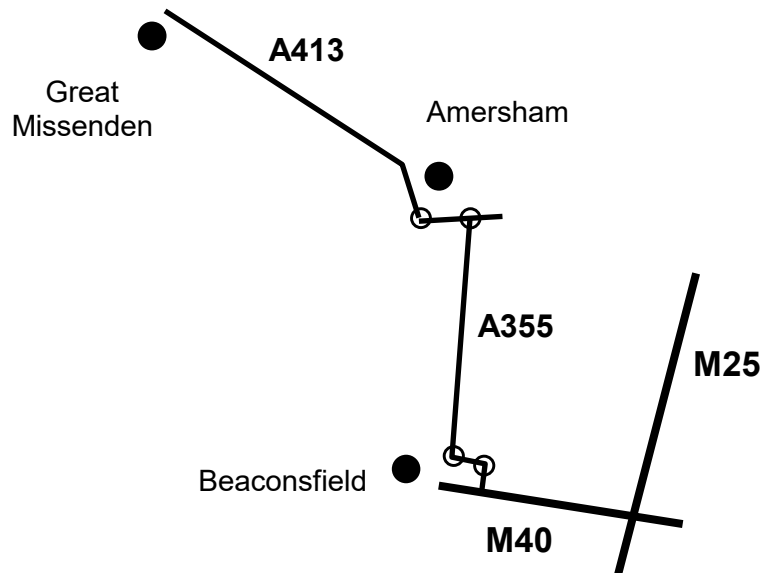
- 8 Having turned **left** on the tarmac drive (or going back over the bridge if you visited the church), follow the lane, *Church Street*, along an avenue of trees, and into the oldest part of the town. You pass a terrace, a square, one or two fine houses, more higgledy-piggledy streets, painted cottages, a B&B in case you want to stay. Finally, turn **right** on the High Street, so narrow that, with double-yellow lines on each side, it is almost without cars to spoil the sight. The *Roald Dahl Museum* is a short distance on your right, *open Thur to Sun from 10am; you don't need a ticket for the shop and café*. The timbered *Crown House* on your left was the basis of Sophie's orphanage in Roald Dahl's *BFG*. After *St Andrews Bookshop* you reach the *Cross Keys* (the only remaining pub in the centre of the town, apart from the *Wild Kite Bottleshop* near the station). Finally you reach the road junction in the town where the walk began.



Getting there

By train: trains half-hourly from London Marylebone Station, approx 45 mins (6 stops). Great Missenden is only one stop outside the Freedom Pass zone.

By car: Great Missenden is on the A413 trunk road. If coming from the London or M25 area, take the M40 to Beaconsfield (junction 2); go north on the A355 (**left** and **right** at roundabouts). Go **left** and **right** again at roundabouts near Amersham onto the A413.



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