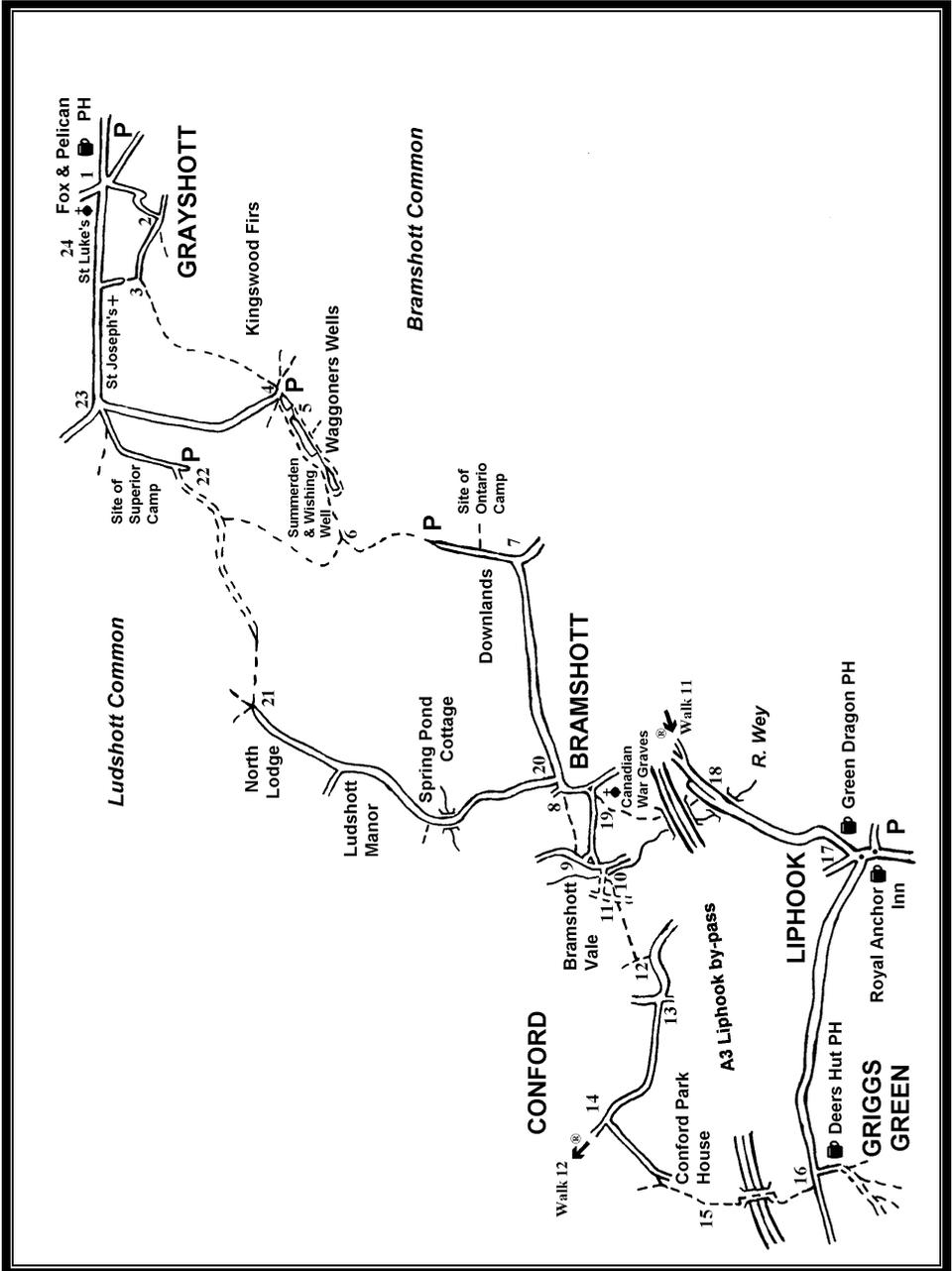


Walk 14 – The Flora Thompson Trail

Distance approximately 10 miles/16 km

Grayshott to Griggs Green [Heatherley to Peverel] and back again



Flora Thompson, author of 'Lark Rise to Candleford', was assistant sub-postmistress in Grayshott (1898–1900) and later postmaster's wife in Liphook (1916–1928). She loved to take long walks through the countryside, and this trail links the two locations using paths which she would have known well.



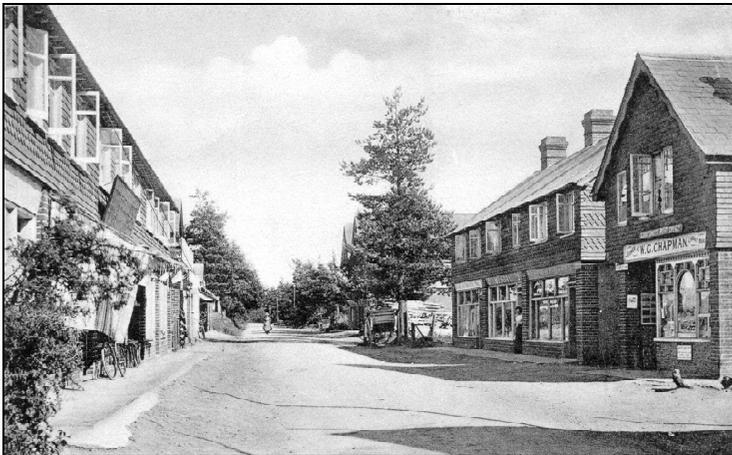
Grayshott to Griggs Green

Distance approximately 5 miles/8km (allow about 2 hours)

Much of the outward route, starting at the *Fox and Pelican* in Grayshott, and ending at the *Deers Hut* in Griggs Green, is little changed from the time Flora herself might have walked it—and both these hostelries are ones which she would have known.

- 1 From the *Fox and Pelican*, turn right for about 50 yards to the 'Fiveways' crossroads.

To visit the site of Flora's post office, cross over and walk along the right of Crossways Road for about a hundred yards, past the present post office to the property called *Pendarvis House*. The original building here was demolished in 1986.



Crossways Road, Grayshott in 1900 – right foreground: Walter G Chapman's post office where Flora Thompson worked at the time

From 'Fiveways,' take the unsurfaced Hill Road, said to be named after broomsquire William 'Body' Hill who lived here in Flora's time. The garden behind the hedge on the right belongs to *Apley House*, built for Edgar Leuchars in 1880. He was the man who pressed for a telegraph service to be

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installed at Grayshott post office in 1890. At the end, turn right down Stoney Bottom.

This is the nearest of the 'escape routes' which Flora could have used when leaving the post office for a walk in the surrounding countryside. In May 1900, a Dr Coleclough was caught and prosecuted for trying to poison the dog of James Belton, who lived down here – an incident which Flora recalls at some length in *Heatherley*.

- 2 Turn right at the bottom and proceed down the valley track, which leads towards Waggoners Wells. In a while, note the houses up on the hill to the right. One of these used to be called *Mount Cottage*, and in the late 1870s was a small village shop run by Henry Robinson. It was bought by Mr I'Anson (see below), and Mr Robinson moved to Crossways Road to build a shop there which became the first post office in 1887.

After passing a track which comes steeply down from the right, the land at the top of the hill on the right is the site the first house in Grayshott, built by Edward I'Anson on enclosed common land in 1862 and originally named *Heather Lodge*. [It later became the *Cenacle* convent which was demolished for a housing development in 1999.] Family tradition says that I'Anson rode on horseback from Clapham to view the plot prior to the purchase.

In those days, Grayshott was noted as a lawless area in which gangs of robbers roamed freely, and I'Anson was warned that they would never allow a stranger to settle among them. But he persevered, and he and his family not only lived peaceably, but also began exercise a 'benevolent aristocracy' over the other inhabitants of the growing village, his daughter Catherine becoming particularly active on the parish council and other local organising bodies.

Up on the opposite side of the valley, invisible among the trees, is a house now called *Hunter's Moon*, but originally named *Kingswood Firs*. It was built in 1887 by James Mowatt who was, in a way, instrumental in Flora leaving Grayshott, since it was he who pressed for a rival telegraph service to be established in Hindhead.

- 3 Keep to the valley path, past a pumping station, and through the wooden barrier. In a while the track moves from the valley floor where this becomes overgrown and boggy, and you pass a series of small ponds before arriving at the top lake of Waggoners Wells.

Before the days of the motor car, the road which crosses the stream here was used as a route for traffic between Haslemere and Frensham.

- 4 Cross the ford by the footbridge (see photo p.46) and then turn left to follow the path along the right-hand bank of the lake.

Note shortly the stone dedicated to Sir Robert Hunter (see photo p.49), a founder of The National Trust in 1895, who lived in Haslemere and was also employed by the post office, though in a somewhat more senior position than Flora – he was legal advisor at Head Office. Flora would have been aware of a well-reported battle taking place during her time in Grayshott, to protect Hindhead Common. Sir Robert was

involved in this, and a few years later initiated a local 'buy-out' to transfer it to the Trust. After his death, Waggoners Wells was also acquired by the Trust, and was dedicated to his memory in 1919. [Note the unusual spelling of 'Waggeners' on it – originally the ponds were called 'Wakeners Wells']

Flora says she 'did not often linger by the lakes' on her Sunday walks, but 'climbed at once by a little sandy track to the heath beyond.' To your right there are several tracks leading uphill to Ludshott Common, and perhaps she met old 'Bob Pikesley' up there or on one of the other local commons, herding his three or four cows.

Also in that direction is Grayshott Hall, site of the old Grayshott Farm rented for several months in 1867 by Alfred Tennyson and his family while building a house of their own near Haslemere. It is said that he wrote his short ode *Flower in the crannied wall* while he was here, some thirty years before Flora trod the same paths.

- 5 Cross the dam of the top pond, and continue down the left-hand bank of the second pond. Here in autumn, the colour of the trees opposite reflected in the water still brings photographers to the site, as it did in Flora's time.



Waggoners Wells – Flora says: 'In autumn the foliage of the trees, red, yellow and russet, was seen in duplicate, above and upon the still, glassy surface.'

The ponds are not natural, having been built in the first half of the 17th century by Henry Hooke, lord of the manor of Bramshott and a local ironmaster. He already had ironworks in the neighbouring Hammer Vale, and presumably wanted to add to his capacity by building another works here. But he seems not to have done so – or at least no evidence of an ironworks has ever been found – and we are left instead to enjoy these quiet pools as his legacy. Flora's husband John used to come fishing here when they lived at Liphook.

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The walk may be continued down either side of the third pond, although the path on the left bank is easier. Note the small quarry in the north bank by each dam – it was from here that material was taken to build them, some 400 years ago.

At the dam to the third (and last) pond, take the right-hand side again, and follow the path passing to the left of *Summerden* down to the wishing well.

When Flora first saw this in 1898 she described it as ‘a deep sandy basin fed by a spring of crystal clear water which gushed from the bank above’ and said that it had dozens of pins at the bottom which had been dropped in it for luck—some by her. However when she returned in the 1920s, *Summerden* had been built and the water then ‘fell in a thin trickle from a lead pipe, the sandy basin having been filled in.’ People, she said, seemed to have forgotten its existence.

She might be happier today to see that it has not quite been forgotten. Although there is no longer a sandy basin, a new well now invites the passer-by to throw in a coin for the benefit of The National Trust – and, of course, to make a wish (see photo p.45).

- 6 Carry on down the path, cross the stream by the footbridge (see photo p.52), and follow the bridle path to the right and up a sunken track. (In muddy conditions you may wish to take the alternative but steeper route on higher ground). At the crest of the hill keep following this track down and then steeply up the other side of a valley, with the fence of Downlands Estate to your right. In about half a mile, after passing an area used as a car park, the track becomes a paved road.

To your left is Bramshott Common and the site of Ontario Camp, one of several encampments built in the district by Canadian soldiers during the Second World War. The common had been used extensively by Canadians in the First World War also, and Flora mentions in one of her *Peveler Papers* how ‘row upon row of wooden huts, churches, shops and theatres sprang up in a week or two. The whole place became a populous town.’ That site is now commemorated by a double row of maple trees along the sides of the A3 Portsmouth road.

To your right is *Downlands*, which attracted riders such as Princess Anne to the Horse Trials held here annually from 1963 until 1982.

- 7 After about half a mile, turn right down another paved road (Rectory Lane) and past the main entrance to *Downlands*. The road soon becomes one of the typical ‘sunken lanes’ of the region before emerging in Bramshott village.
- 8 Where the paved road bears left, continue through some railings and down the sunken path ahead. Here you can imagine more easily how many of the local lanes would have looked in earlier times (see photo p.71).
- 9 At the bottom, turn left onto a road. Go past the terraces of houses on the right. Note on your left the house aptly named *Roundabout*, wedged between the forks of the road coming down from Bramshott church. This was once the home of actor Boris Karloff. Continue along the road ahead for a few yards, then right at the gate to *Bramshott Vale*.

- 10 Walk up the drive and cross the southern River Wey. Shortly afterwards, go left through a kissing gate (see photo p.72), cut across a field and over two stiles towards an avenue of lime trees.

Don't be alarmed at this point to find yourself in the company of some very docile highland cattle (see photo p.71). These and other animals are used in season as part of a natural heathland management scheme for local commons, cropping vegetation such as birch, gorse and grass, and allowing the heather to flourish. One feels that Flora would have approved.

- 11 Follow footpath signs diagonally across the avenue, through a small metal gate, across a farmyard, over a stile by a larger metal gate and then follow a path along the right-hand side of a field. Turn left at a T-junction of paths and over a stile to meet the B3004 Liphook to Bordon road.
- 12 Cross carefully and turn right, going along the pavement for about a hundred yards to where the road bends sharp right.
- 13 Follow the bridleway sign straight ahead down the drive towards *Conford Park House*.



The drive of Conford Park House crossing the bridge towards the gatehouse

- 14 After slightly more than half a mile, bear left at a grass triangle, cross a bridge by a weir, and pass through some iron gates. Take the footpath to the right, immediately after the gatehouse garden, following behind the line of a hedge. Pass through a smaller iron gate, cross a clearing in front of an old cottage and take the footpath signposted straight ahead. This soon joins a bridleway and winds generally uphill through a beech wood. It can be rather muddy in places.
- 15 Bear left just before a gate to an Army firing range and follow Bridleway signs across a bridge over the by-pass (which takes the A3 London to Portsmouth traffic away from the centre of Liphook), and eventually down to meet a road (Longmoor Road).

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The house called *Woolmer Gate*, to which Flora and her family moved when it was new in 1926, is just along the road to the right.

16 Cross the road and go up the drive almost opposite towards the *Deers Hut* pub and a small cluster of cottages – the original hamlet of Griggs Green.



The Deers Hut and cottages as they were at the start of the 20thC

In her 1925 *Guide to Liphook*, Flora says ‘it was one of the old forest ale-houses, nor has its function altered much, for neighbours from the scattered houses upon the heath still meet there upon summer evenings to take a glass and discuss things ... just as their forbears must have done for centuries.’



Tracks, once more frequently used, lead from Griggs Green southwards to Forest Mere and beyond, and upwards onto Weaver’s Down. This is Flora’s *Peverel* – ‘a land of warm sands, of pine and heather and low-lying bog-lands.’ She urges you to ‘take one of the multitudinous pathways at pleasure; each one leads sooner or later to the summit from which, on a clear day, magnificent views reward the climber. Forest Mere lake lies like a mirror in the woods directly beneath; to the south is the blue ridge of the South Downs; to the north the heathery heights of Hindhead.’

At the end of this section of the guide, Flora adds enigmatically: ‘It does not come within the scope of the present work to dwell upon the beauty and interest of this spot more fully; the present writer hopes to deal more fully with it in a future book.’ As far as we know, that book never materialised.

See also ‘The Peverel Papers’ by Flora Thompson, ISBN 978-1-873855-57-7

Return to Grayshott

Distance approximately 5 miles/8km (allow about 2 hours)

There is a lack of convenient public transport between Liphook and Grayshott. For those wishing to make the return journey to Grayshott by foot, here is an alternative which forms a 'figure of eight' with the route out, crossing it at Bramshott.

- 16 From the *Deers Hut*, turn right along Longmoor Road for the mile-long walk towards the centre of Liphook.

John Thompson and Diana would have cycled to work by this route after they moved to Griggs Green. Along this road also there were one or two small private schools, and Peter Thompson may well have attended one of them. On page 12 of the 1925 *Guide to Liphook*, for example, Miss A. B. Skevington advertises her 'Day School for Girls and Preparatory School for Boys' in a house called *Woodheath*.

- 17 At the Square take the second road left (London Road) which, before the village was by-passed, bore all the road traffic between Portsmouth and London. On the right-hand side of the road note the HSBC Bank, which was the post office when Flora was here. There is a plaque on the house to its left, where she lived with her family from 1916 to 1926.



London Road, Liphook around 1914 – the post office is the single-storey building with arched windows; the postmaster's house adjoins it to the left; the 'Green Dragon' is in the right foreground

Further along the road on the right is the old school building now used as a public library. If it is open, you may care to go inside and inspect the sculpture of Flora by Philip Jackson, commissioned in 1981 and moved to the library in 1995.

Follow the left-hand side of London Road out of the village and over the river, following the old road to the left where it divides from the new (18).

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Note to the left of the road bridge an old aqueduct over the river, part of a large network of irrigation sluices and channels which stretched for miles along the valley. These were designed to obtain a second annual harvest of animal fodder by flooding the riverside meadows at intervals, and are now part of a conservation project.

- 18 About a hundred yards after crossing the river, take the footpath to the left. This path, known locally as ‘The Hanger’, leads into the back of Bramshott churchyard, and was used in Flora’s day by Liphook schoolboys attending Bramshott school, the Liphook school being only for girls. In her *Guide to Liphook*, Flora said: ‘The raised footpath overhangs, like a terrace, the valley of the infant Wey, a small streamlet at this point, but already known locally as “The River.” The path is, and has been from time immemorial, the approach from this side of the parish to the Parish Church.’ Its peace has been somewhat shattered in recent years by the construction of the large bypass bridge overhead.



‘The Hanger’ path between Liphook and Bramshott

On entering the churchyard, you will see to your left the rows of graves of 317 Canadian soldiers who died in the military hospital on Bramshott Common during the First World War – many from the influenza epidemic in late 1918 rather than from enemy action (see photo p.68). Their 95 Catholic colleagues are laid to rest at St Joseph’s church in Grayshott, which you will pass later.

On the other side of the churchyard wall, to your right, note the rear of Bramshott Manor which is said to be one of the oldest continually inhabited houses in Hampshire, dating as it does from the year 1220. Flora said: ‘Very few houses of its antiquity have escaped so well the hands of the restorer.’

Continue through the churchyard and turn right towards Bramshott church itself (‘only five years younger than the Magna Carta’) which is well worth a visit.

19 Leave the churchyard by the lych gate, cross over the road and proceed straight ahead to the left of the green triangle. Soon you retrace your steps of the outward journey up Rectory Lane for a few yards. The road bears right passing Limes Close. Shortly, take the next road to the left.

20 Follow this road, which dips down to cross the stream coming from Waggoners Wells, then rises to run past *Spring Pond Cottage* (a favourite of Flora's) and the entrance to *Ludshott Manor* itself.

Where the surfaced road bears left, go straight ahead along an unmade track for another half mile or so. Here, at *North Lodge*, you arrive at the entrance to Ludshott Common, an area of wood and heathland which extends for many hundreds of acres and is now owned by The National Trust.

From this point several routes may be struck at will across the common towards Grayshott. The one detailed below skirts its edge.

21 Go through the wooden posts, and turn right following the bridleway around the edge of the common. It can be boggy in places but this improves when the first of two houses is reached and the track becomes a roughly-surfaced access road. Continue along this, ignoring turns to the right which lead down to the valley of Waggoners Wells.

In Flora's time, the view to your left would have been open, with purple heather and yellow gorse stretching almost as far as the eye could see. Lack of animal grazing since then has allowed the trees to grow here, but if you walk towards the middle of the common you will find areas which the National Trust has brought back to the original state. And there, as dusk falls on a summer evening, you can still hear the drumming of the Nightjar which so fascinated Tennyson when he lived near here.

22 About half a mile past the houses, you suddenly find yourself on concrete (see photo p.50). This is a remnant of Superior Camp, another of the 'Great Lakes' camps built by the Canadians to house their soldiers during the Second World War. The huts were used as temporary accommodation by local civilians for some years afterwards, but now only a few footings remain, along with the occasional garden plant looking incongruous in a heathland setting.

Turn left and follow the concrete road to its junction with the B3002 Bordon to Hindhead road. *Grayshott House* on your right was once briefly the home of the broadcaster Richard Dimbleby.

23 From here it is a direct walk for about a mile along the pavement and back to Grayshott. In Flora's day this road was described as being 'a sandy track with encroaching gorse'!

St Joseph's, with the 95 Catholic Canadian graves from the First World War, is on your right about fifty yards along the road next to the driveway to the old *Cenacle* convent, now a gated housing development.

Further along on the right, note the entrance to *Pinewood*, where the I'Anson family lived for many years. The village school and laundry (the latter now a pottery, café and gift shop) which are along School Lane to the left were both

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institutions started by them.

- 24 St Luke's church, with its impressive spire, is on your left as you arrive back at the village centre. The foundation stone was laid in the summer of 1898 by Miss Catherine I'Anson, shortly before Flora arrived in the village – the spire was not completed until 1910.

At the western end of the churchyard are the graves of Conan Doyle's first wife, Mary, and their son Kingsley who died of wounds in the First World War. And at the eastern end, towards the cross-roads, is that of Harold Oliver Chapman and his wife Sarah Annie, born 29 Sep 1878, died 29 Jun 1969. Perhaps you may care to pause here for a while to remember with affection the 'pretty, blue-eyed, sweet-natured girl of eighteen' who, Flora says, made her life tolerable during her time in Grayshott.



The 'Fox & Pelican' at Grayshott, soon after its opening in 1899

And if you feel weary now after your ten mile walk, then reflect as you relax in the *Fox and Pelican* that Flora would have thought nothing of walking nineteen or twenty miles in one of her daily wanderings!

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