

POYNINGS VILLAGE

Poynings sits quietly and comfortably at the foot of the South Downs. It is just a handful of miles northwest of Brighton and yet here, hidden away from the bustle of the coast, it enjoys a tranquillity more reminiscent of an age long past.

Distance: About 1 hour to stroll around the 2-mile route.

Starting point: Our walk around the village starts from the car park of the Royal Oak Inn, by kind permission.



From the car park return to the main road and turn right. Immediately on your right is the former Zion Chapel of 1843.

The chapel is no longer used although Zionism is still active and encourages Diaspora Jews to immigrate and take an active interest in the Jewish state. A little further along the 'brewery cottages & flats' on your left offer a quite different reminder that even small villages were self-sufficient in this essential farming commodity.

On reaching Dyke Farm walk past the covered gateway on your right and in a further 25 metres (before reaching Greenacres) turn right down a broad cobbled drive which appears at first to be a little intrusive but which leads past the farmhouse to an iron gate opening onto a large field. As you pass through the gate look carefully at the wall on your right at the intriguing use of some empty bottles!

Continue ahead walking gently down the hill.

When you reach the tall tree look back at the village. Above the tall pine trees to your right you should be able to pick out the dark green line of the old funicular railway which ran down from Devils Dyke to Poynings. It was opened on 24th July 1897 and was a double track funicular - one carriage going up as the other came down. Sadly it only operated for 11 years but in its time it brought many Dyke visitors down to Poynings for a 'Dainty Sussex Tea'.

In a further 300 metres the grassy path passes to the left of some derelict buildings and on crossing over a small stream joins a crossing footpath. Turn right here following the broad farm track in an easterly direction. A little further along on the right we pass Mill House.

This was the site of the lower mill of Poynings, where there was a very close shave for local smugglers in the 18th century. Two kegs of illegal brandy had been half-hidden in the millpond when the excise men arrived unexpectedly to search the mill itself. A message was sent to the upper mill to release the water from the top pond and drown the bobbing kegs before they were spotted!

In a further 75m turn right along a footpath and in 100m, at the T-junction with a tarmac path, turn left. On reaching the public road turn right and walk gently up the hill past 'Downmere' towards the parish church. Facing the church is Cora's Corner with two sheltered benches, which make a nice resting place.

Cora was the wife of impresario Emile Littler and they lived at Downmere for many years. It was Emile's brother, Prince Littler, who founded I.T.V. and the London Palladium. Cora died in 2004 aged 102 ! The benches are named after her daughters - Judy & Merrilee.

Walk now carefully up the steps of Holy Trinity church.

The most striking feature on entering the church is its sheer size. It is cruciform in the shape of a 'Greek Cross' being almost as wide as it is long. It was almost entirely rebuilt in the late 1300's thanks to an endowment from Michael, Lord of Poynings and is in the 'Perpendicular' style. Amongst its many delightful features are the faint remains of a mural on the wall facing the main entrance, which lists the Ten Commandments and one of the very oldest wooden ladders in Sussex leading up to the belfry.

Return now down the steps and turn right along the road. In less than 20 metres continue ahead off the road to enter Manor Farm. In front of the first brick & flint building turn left to walk between the farm buildings. If any reminder were needed that farms are working places - here is it...mud and all!

On entering the open field head slightly right of the two white fronted houses in the distance. The attractive hill up on your right now is 'Newtimber', owned and looked after by The National Trust.

This is sheep country and one of the best-loved shepherds of bygone days was Nelson Coppard. He was born in Poynings in 1863 and worked on these downs all his life. He once said to his friend Barclay Wills -

"I says what I thinks an' I talks in front o' people as I talks behind their backs! If what you thinks be right then what you says will be right too."

Wise words indeed from the old shepherd!

On reaching a metal gate with a stile to its right turn sharp left heading towards the largest oak tree across the field– this is generally in the direction of the aerals on Truleigh Hill. Cross a wooden footbridge (20 metres to the right of the large oak tree) over a clear running stream. A stile leads into the next field, which we cross following the hedgeline on the right. Exit from this field over a second stile into the former school playground.

The site was donated to the village by Queen Victoria in 1858 and many still remember with affection their days at 'Poynings National School'. Today the hall is owned by the church and is also used as a Village Hall and as a delightful nursery school.

Walk through the gate onto the public road and turn left and in just 20 metres (before Downmere) turn right down a narrow tarmac path.

Pass through a kissing gate and as the now concrete path heads uphill keep to the tall wooden fencing on your left, walking on the grass away from the path.

Go through a metal kissing gate and cross over the top of a slight rise on this grassy track, keeping close to the wooden fence. The path finally drops down through another kissing gate onto the main road where a right turn will lead along Cora's Path, past the Emile Littler Foundation benches, to the welcoming sight of The Royal Oak.

This walk was researched and written for Mid Sussex District Council by Footprints of Sussex who lead local guided walks throughout the year. www.footprintsofsussex.co.uk

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