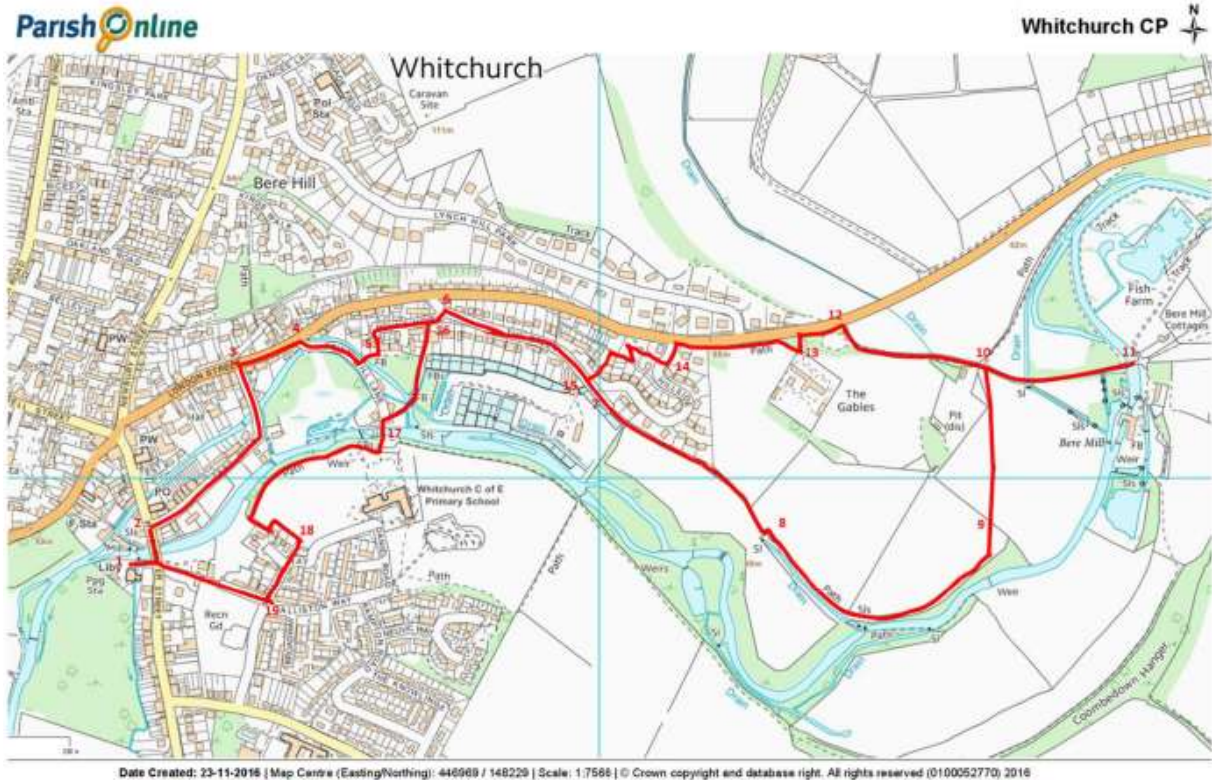




THE RIVER TEST to BERE MILL via TOWN PATHS (2.5 miles, 1 hour)



ParishOnline



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The walk begins at the Winchester Street car park next to the Silk Mill. (1)

Leave the car park and turn left along Winchester Street crossing over the River Test at Town Bridge. Whitchurch Silk Mill on your left dates from 1815 and is the oldest surviving silk mill in the country still weaving in its original Regency building.

Cross over the road and take the next turning on the right (2); Test Road was built across an area of land known previously as Frog Island. The road bends to the left at the bottom and crosses a smaller branch of the river that forms the island. At the junction turn right along London Street, the old 'Exeter Road' out of London (3). In Victorian times this was a busy coach road until the coming of the railways in the mid. 19th century.

Continue along London Street to Town Mill Lane. Opposite Town Mill Lane you can see the tiny 'Voters Cottage' so named because the rental value entitled its owner to vote for the county MP after the town was disenfranchised in 1832.

Cross the small bridge into Town Mill Lane (4) and continue along keeping the small branch of the river to your left. The meadow to your right is a good example of a typical valley floor landscape and conserves ancient grazing scenes allowing Town Mill to retain its original setting on the banks of the River Test. Cross the small footbridge on your left and then turn left on a path between houses (5). Turn right along Pound Meadow and then right at the junction with The Green (6).

Walk along the Green until, at the end (7) you take a footpath between trees straight ahead. Continue through a gate and follow the path alongside a field on your right. The path bends left (up a slope) and then immediately right, next to a gate (8). The path then carries on with a fence and field to your left. You reach a kissing gate and pass through (9). Take some time to enjoy the views across to Bere Mill on your right. The path heads for the far left corner of the next field, where you pass through another kissing gate onto Bere Mill Lane (10). PN. You can expect to encounter livestock in this field, **DOGS MUST BE KEPT ON A LEAD**.

Here, make a short diversion to the right to enjoy the river views from the bridge at Bere Mill (11). Built on the site of one of the 5 mills mentioned in the Domesday Book, Bere Mill was owned by the Portal family of papermakers in the early 18th century and was the first mill to produce paper for the Bank of England bank notes.



Retrace your steps along Bere Mill Lane, passing the point where you first joined it and carrying on until you reach the B3400 (12). Turn left along a path and left again into the driveway of The Gables, the former Whitchurch Workhouse. Turn immediately right (13) along a path that winds around the right hand edge of a field, eventually emerging onto London Street. A few yards further on, turn left into Hillside and 20 yards further on, cross the road and take a path right (14) down a zig-zag path to the bottom of the slope.

Turn left at the bottom and cross the road slightly to the right passing through a gap with bollards by an attractive wooden chalet (15) then turn right to walk along The Green.

Continue along The Green, bearing left at the junction and within a few yards, turn left (16) onto a footpath between houses. On the left behind the houses you will see the disused Whitchurch watercress beds adjoining a small private nature reserve. Following the path through the trees you will cross small footbridges from which you can view several river channels and the sluices controlling the flow of water.

You emerge by Town Mill and the footbridge over the main part of the River Test. The present structure is 18th century, although there has probably been a corn mill on this site for at least a thousand years. In 1966 Ronald and Rosemary Eastman (owners of Town Mill) filmed a pair of common kingfishers at their underground nest on this stretch of the River Test. *The Private Life of the Kingfisher* screened in 1967 was the first BBC natural history film to be shown in colour.

Cross over the footbridge (17) and then turn right to follow the path around the perimeter fence of the school playing field. At the end, turn right (18), cross over the entrance to the cul-de-sac on your right and then take the path on your right opposite Alliston Way (keeping the beech hedge to your left) (19). In the 19th century the land to your right, now occupied by housing, was a hop garden.

The path continues after a kissing gate, running between flint and brick walls before emerging onto Winchester Street and opposite the car park entrance that marks the end of your walk. Please take care when crossing the road.