



EXPLORE WHITCHURCH & the RIVER TEST (2 miles approx. 45 minutes)



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

Carefully cross the road to find a path straight ahead of you between walls. At the end of the path, pass through a kissing gate and continue down this road keeping the beech hedge to your right. In the 19th century the land to your left, now occupied by housing, was a hop garden.

At the end turn left (2) cross over the entrance to the cul-de-sac and look for a path ahead of you that turns left at the boundary of the school playing field (3) and skirts around the outside of the field.

The footpath comes out by Town Mill (4) – bear left and cross the footbridge over the main part of the River Test. The present mill 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.

Continue along Town Mill Lane. The meadow to your left 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. The road goes over a small humped bridge, directly opposite 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.

Turn left along London Street, the old 'Exeter Road' out of London (5); in Victorian times this was a busy coach road until the coming of the railways in the mid. 19th century.

Walk along until you reach the centre of Whitchurch at the mini roundabout. Take a minute to read the plaque on the front wall of the baker's shop commemorating the Salvation Army's victory at the High Court in London in 1890 when the Right to Peaceful Protest was won for the country (6).



With the Co-op on your right, walk along Church Street to the Kings Arms. During the English Civil War royalist troops were billeted here on their way to the Battle of Newbury. Continue along Church Street and opposite the fire station and the petrol station turn into a road on the right called Fairclose (7) thought to be the site of the medieval fairs. Follow this path straight ahead past the Old Elementary School, opened in 1845 when compulsory education came into force, until you reach Wells Lane (8) at the top.

Cross over Wells Lane to a path which continues through an old foot tunnel under the dismantled Didcot to Southampton railway line and turn left (9) to follow the embankment behind the old station house. If you are able to see above the fence you will notice some of the architectural features and railway fixtures that have been retained. Continue to follow this path over a road and eventually round to the right and between houses; then turn left (10) to walk down the road with the town's cemetery to your right. At the main road, turn left under the brick railway bridge arch (11) and continue straight along, crossing over the end of Wells Lane, to the hairpin bend in the road directly in front of All Hallows Church. (12)

Parts of All Hallows Church date from the 12th, 13th and 15th centuries, but it was much altered in the 1860s when the Gothic Revival spire was added to the Norman tower. Inside are brasses and effigies of the Brooke family, who once lived in the house opposite (now called Kings Lodge) and memorials to the Portal family of papermakers. The most notable monument is a 9th century grave marker for a Saxon woman called Frithburga,

It reads: "HIC CORPUS FRITHBURGAE REQUIESCIT IN PACEM SEPULTUM", translated as, "Here the body of Frithburga lies buried in peace". Whoever she was, she represents the Saxon community of centuries ago. Outside is a very large yew tree thought to be over 800 years old making it one of the oldest trees in Hampshire.

Carefully cross the road and take the footpath opposite which runs straight ahead and down to the River Test.

Turn right **(13)** to walk along by the river bank, until you reach the footbridge at Fulling Mill **(14)**. PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE IS NO CYCLING ALONG THIS PATH and DOGS ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE RIVER.

Cross over the bridge and pause a while to admire the beautiful clear chalk stream. After crossing the bridge, turn left and walk along the small single-track lane. Before reaching the junction with Winchester Street look to your left across the water meadow to the old tithe barn. In the past farmers were required to give one-tenth of their produce to the established Church to help support their local priest and this would be stored in the tithe barn.

Turn left along Winchester Street **(15)** and continue past the housing to your start point at the Winchester Street car park, next to Whitchurch Silk Mill.