

# A virtual tour around Alresford, with a twist of watercress

Guided by the Watercress Way Charity



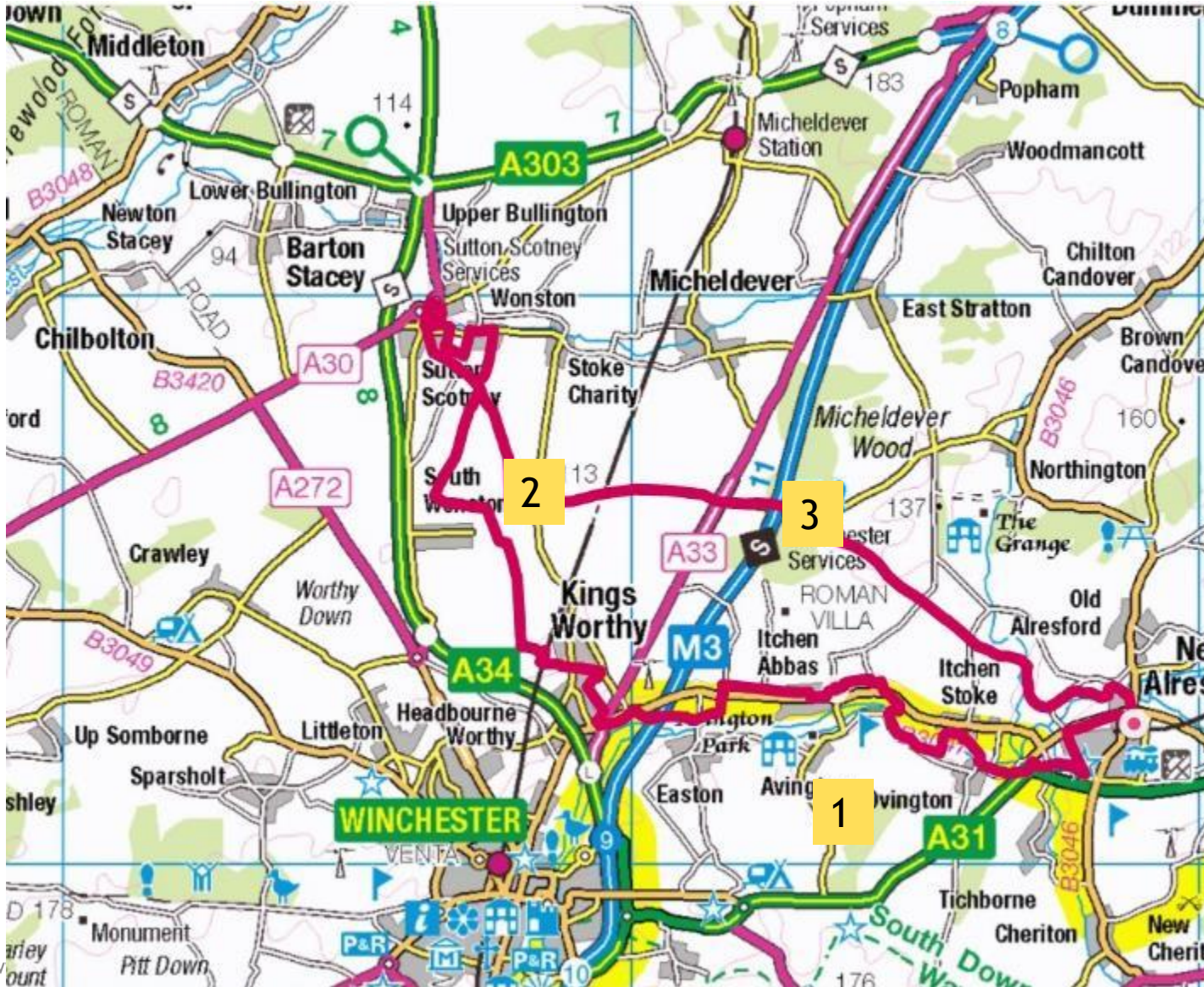
[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)

Most old photos courtesy of Godfrey Andrews [Alresford Heritage Old Photographs](#)





# The Watercress Way Trail



🌿 An unusual trail!

🌿 It follows parts of two Victorian railway lines, closed mid 20<sup>th</sup> C.  
Sections 1 & 2

🌿 These are linked by historic livestock droves Section 3

🌿 The trail crosses beautiful rolling chalk downland & parts of world-famous Rivers Itchen, Arle and Dever.

🌿 Waymarked for walkers 2016

🌿 27 miles, 44 kms

🌿 3 main sections, with 10 stages, each 2-8 miles

🌿 Multiple gateways

🌿 Alternatives for cyclists & horse riders

Watercress Way 27.15 mls March 2021 (ordnancesurvey.co.uk)



# The Watercress Way Charity

## The Watercress Way

A long distance, circular, trail near Winchester.

It follows two old railway track beds linked by historic droves.

The trail is waymarked for walkers. Some sections are accessible to cyclists and horse riders. Head outdoors for beautiful views, rich wildlife and a peaceful time in the glorious Hampshire countryside.

For maps of the marathon length route, suggested shorter walks, how to support us, visit [www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)



CHARITY REGISTRATION  
NO. 1167675





Kim Adams Trustee  
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# Watercress Line



COVID-19 UPDATE

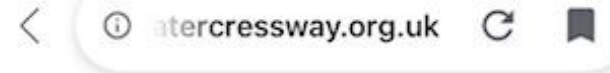


- 1973 Line closure
- Infrastructure ripped out
- Volunteers formed a charity & reopened 10 mile section East Alresford-Alton.
- 1985 The Watercress Line opened fully for heritage trains.

[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)

**BUY TICKETS**

# Watercress Way



- Charity devised marathon length circular trail
- Named after watercress grown around the whole trail, not just Alresford
- Includes parts of 'The 7 Lost Miles' of The Watercress Line & the Didcot-Newbury-Southampton Railways.



The Watercress Way



Setting up our adjacent stalls at The Watercress Festival 2018



# Back to the roots of this 'Watercress Capital'

Spot how many watercress farms here!

Some now abandoned

This talk will give an insight into chalk springs, watercress & speedy steam trains .... With some other stories on the way!



Perhaps walk this route yourself!

Watercress Festival Walk Alresford  
([ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://ordnancesurvey.co.uk))



Obviously...wish we were there....



So the next best thing....!

Past May Watercress Festivals and Watercress Way guided tours





# A 2.3 miles/ 3.7kms virtual tour



[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)

[Watercress Festival Walk Alresford  
\(ordnancesurvey.co.uk\)](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk)

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Pride & Prejudice?
2. **Station Rd** a house, here? A  
burghage story
3. **Broad St-** 800 years of fairs  
& sheep
4. **Mill Lane** -a mini Marrakesh  
?
5. **Weir/Laundry** abandoned  
beds
6. **Pinglestone** -Watercress  
Farm
7. **Eel House**-Sargasso Sea  
links
8. **R Arle** : a river road &  
Fulling Mill
9. **The Dean & Jacklyn's Lane**  
– the long haul
10. **The station** - it's a wrap



Photo courtesy Brodnax Moore

# 1. Literally the Start: Alresford Station .... Pride & prejudice?



Meet **Edward Knight**,  
entrepreneur nephew of the  
novelist, Jane Austen



Chaired investors in '**Railway  
Mania era**....in The Swan



1865 opening of 17 miles Mid-  
Hants railway, from Alton to  
Winchester Junction (Kings  
Worthy)



**Later** nicknamed Watercress Line,  
not...Racehorse or Turnip Line!





# The sidings are still there

Station Yard carpark in 2021, opposite the main station entrance. Now Station Mill Gym and café

- ① Feed mill built In 1860
- ① Sidings link to main rail track
- ① 1914 : Spot the ‘flats’ carts laden with watercress & leather waders worn by the ‘Cressers’
- ① Wide watercress catchment shown from cart ownership:
- ① Left: Mr Hunt, Fobdown Farm
- ① Middle : Mr Mills, Bishops Sutton
- ① Right: Mr Giles, Cheriton





# But the story starts further afield ..

- 🌱 1805 William Bradbury, Springhead Gardens: Gravesend first commercial farm, for London.
- 🌱 Victorian boom & Covent Garden Market.



## ^ Watercress cultivation



William's grandson Richard Bradbury at the watercress farm West Hyde

In an article by Henry Bellenden Ker, [FRS](#) in 1822, to the [London Horticultural Society](#). He states, "I lately found that watercress is grown in this neighbourhood, by Mr. William Bradbury, for the purpose of supplying the [London](#) markets. Mr. Bradbury first began to cultivate the watercress in February 1808, at [Northfleet Spring Head](#), near [Gravesend](#). For this purpose, he procured young plants, and placed them, with a small proportion of the water, in shallow running water; the plants soon formed large [tufts](#), and rapidly spread over the water; and he then gathered the cress regularly for the [London](#) markets". [[3](#)] [William Bradbury - Wikipedia](#)

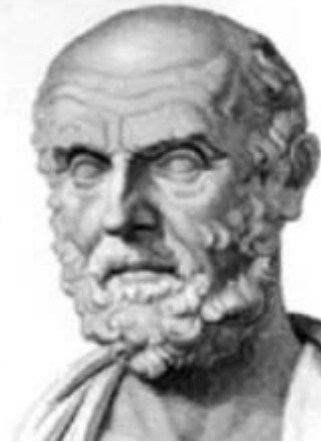


# Superfood? National institution? Garnish?

- 400 BC Kos, Hippocrates: 'The cure of cures'
- Romans 'Nasturtium officinale' – nasturtium- "twisted nose"
- Napoleon a fan
- National institution? World Wars I & II : need for nutritious home grown produce. Watercress sandwiches at "high tea" & school dinners
- Dwindle to a garnish: 1940s >1,000 acres, end of 20thC. only 150
- 2003 renaissance British watercress farmers, rebranding campaign: 'Not Just a Bit on the Side'
- Superfood status helped by celebrities, TV food shows, social media

[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)

**"Let food be  
thy medicine"**  
~ Hippocrates



- Peppery taste
- Good looks
- High concentrations of vitamin A & C, folic acid, iron & calcium.
- Helps /improves skin ageing, lower blood pressure, eye health, cancer treatments

GORDON RAMSAY'S WATERCRESS SOUP



The History of Watercress — Love watercress



## 2. Station Rd: start of the burghage story



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# Norman Town Planning of 'New Alresford'

- Alresford retains much of the burghage town layout from 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> C, when the Bishops of Winchester created 'New Alresford'
- Burghages here measured 33ft by 330 ft or 20 by 2 perches/rods = 40 sq rods. A rod or perch = 5.5 yards/5.03m
- The main building maximised frontage whilst giving privacy.
- Behind were outhouses for animals & servants
- Once common to English towns, burghages largely obliterated by the densification of town centres.

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Railway Station



Station Rd- partly a burghage plot, demolished for access to the station.

Cold War spy plaque on the toilets opposite old police station



### 3. Broad St- 800 years of fairs...& sheep



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# Broad St's 'Painted Ladies'

- ⌚ Apart from woolly white things , here in their 1000's until 1972... why so many Georgian buildings?
- ⌚ Laurence Oxley's - cold War spy link to dead letter drop in toilets Station Rd toilet
- ⌚ No 27- Mary Mitford 19thC poet
- ⌚ No 23- Old Post Office
- ⌚ No 48- One of many local blacksmiths
- ⌚ No 50 -USA HQ in WWII and link to Hambone
- ⌚ Pineapple House No 49 - well named. Look up for signs of 18<sup>th</sup> C. wealth!





## 4. Mill Lane -a mini Marrakesh ?



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# A sleepy market town's secret industrial past

- 🏠 Broad St merges into **Mill Lane**, with the oldest place in town? **'Old Timbers'** partly 14<sup>th</sup> C. with a Georgian **'fire mark'**
- 🏠 The missing house gives a glimpse down an existing burghage plot
- 🏠 **House names** reveal the past: **The Tanneries**. Imagine the smell & noise here from at least Henry VIII's time to 160 years ago
- 🏠 Behind **Weir House** old mill site, spot the cascade, the outfall from the damming of The Great Pond (Bishop de Lucy 1189-1204). The original building had the water cascade through it to drive the millstones.
- 🏠 On to **Arle Mill**, the laundry and abandoned **watercress beds**... and a tale of a freezer!





## 5. Abandoned watercress beds



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# Broken beauty of 'levadas', rewilding....& the freezer!

Fen meadows, marshes of River Arle

Norman **weir** and **ponding** up of Arle

1950s organically farmed **watercress beds** fed partly by springs, and directly by the R. Arle.  
Locals used honesty box in a freezer

Late 1990s/2000's: **rewilding**, via mainly non – intervention by conservation minded owner, to diverse **fen meadows** instead of monoculture of the watercress

Plethora of wildlife returning: freshwater shrimp, otter, cetti warblers, scarlet tiger moth, gipsywort, little egret...

Control of nettles, & invasive species : monkey flower & water fern

[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)



Weir/Arle  
Mill  
watercress  
beds in  
1960 &  
2021





## 6. Pinglestone -Watercress Farm



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# Poor mans' bread no longer

- 🌱 Hampshire is still UK's main centre for watercress.
- 🌱 Spring fed, highly mechanised on most farms, such as Pinglestone
- 🌱 Production takes place all year in concrete lined, gravel beds by rotating growth by both seeds and propagation.
- 🌱 Plastic coverings used for frost protection
- 🌱 Rokes

[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)



Pinglestone Farm watercress beds



Re-enactment of a traditional scene, Watercress Festival

Still sold in cones!



The Watercress Company video 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAkC3gqNJ>



## 7. Eel House & Sargasso Sea



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# On moonless dark nights....

- Very rare 1820's eel trapping building, used up to 1980's
- On 6-8 dark moonless nights August - November mature eels swim downstream to the River Itchen & Southampton to return to their spawning grounds to breed, 3000 miles away in the Sargasso Sea ( Bahamas/ Bermuda.)
- Kept alive for market in wet sacks to Winchester, then later trains / vans to Billingsgate



Spotted by Toni Hayward April 2021 downstream in Winchester





## 8. R Arle : Pinglestone Rd & Fulling Mill



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# Pounding hammers, splashing hooves ... & Amy

Perhaps the most photographed building in Alresford!

- Imagine the noise of **fulling mill** water powered hammers back in the 13<sup>th</sup> C. Only one remains now.
- Fullers Earth was beaten into woven cotton, to close up the weave and improve it.
- The River Arle here runs along... **Pinglestone Rd!** Horses & carriages & in the late 19<sup>th</sup> C, flatbeds of watercress, were frequent users.
- A popular local and tourist spot to feed the ducks- with appropriate food thanks to Amy and her dad!

[www.thewatercressway.org.uk](http://www.thewatercressway.org.uk)





## 9. The long haul ..



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# The long haul...via The Dean



One of the 24 pubs/inns of the late 19<sup>th</sup> C. in Alresford!  
Perhaps the 'cressers' had time to stop for a very early pint on the return from the Station!

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Only 5 survive today, the rest converted into houses



From the Dean, to Jacklyn's Bridge & Station Approach—unlikely train carriages would have been parked on top 'in the day'!



# 10. Back to The Station - it's a wrap!



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# A route for all seasons!



Looking south towards Northington Rd Seashore



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...varied!



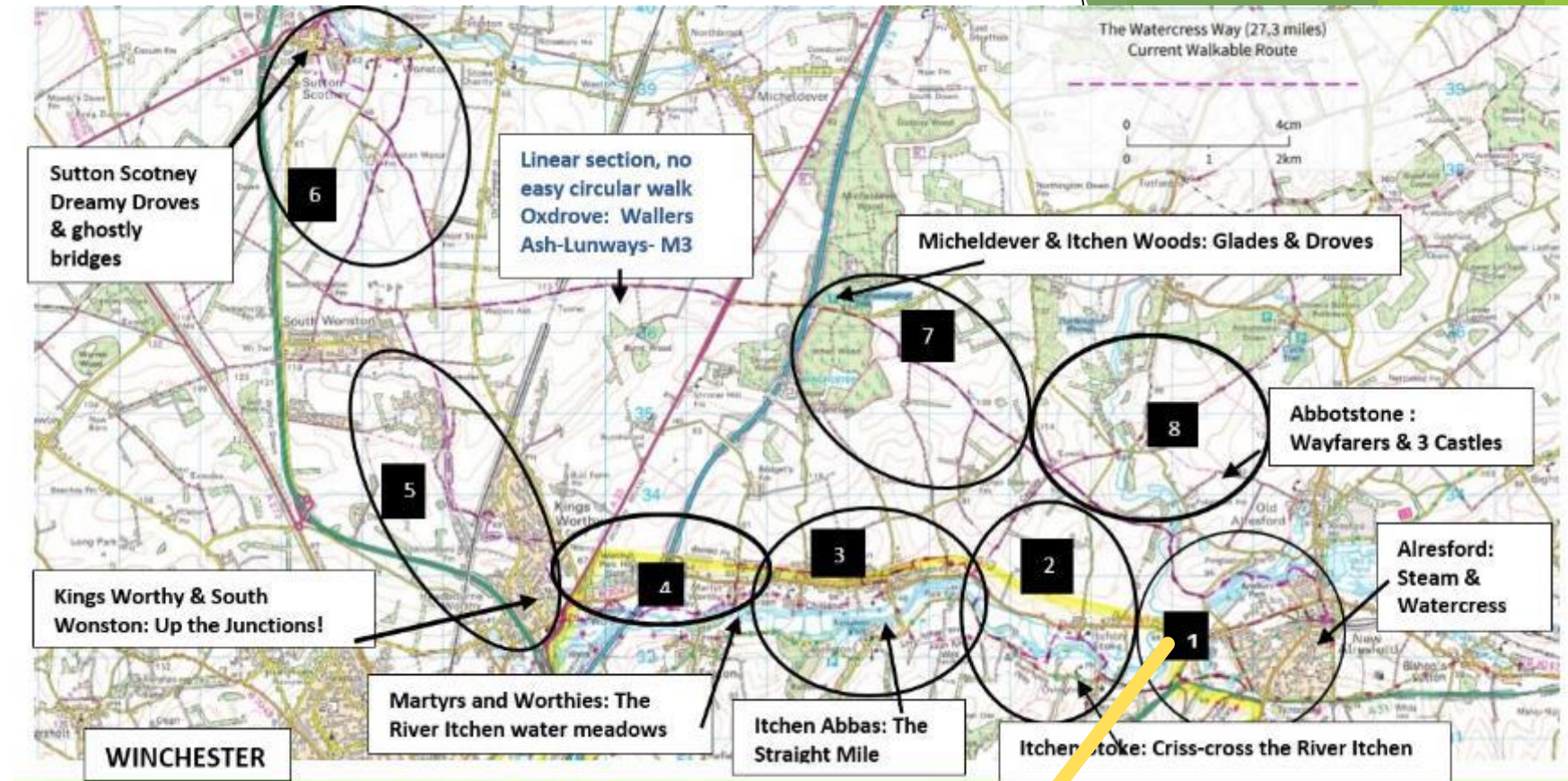


# No need for a marathon!

8 circular walks from the main gateways of

- ❖ Alresford
- ❖ Itchen Abbas
- ❖ Martyr Worthy
- ❖ Easton
- ❖ Kings Worthy
- ❖ South Wonston
- ❖ Sutton Scotney

Walking, Cycling and Horse riding - The Watercress Way



Watercress Festival Walk  
Alresford (ordnancesurvey.co.uk)



# Lastly...what does the charity do?



- Endorsed by the South Downs National Park, Winchester City Council, all the Parish Councils along the route, but....
- We rely on volunteers, donations & sponsorship!
- Welcome to The Watercress Way - The Watercress Way
- Registered: 1167675



Thanks for your support today- Hope you enjoyed the virtual tour.

Do follow us on social media & become a Friend via our website. Perhaps actually see you on future events!

