



## Watercress Way Walks: Kings Worthy 4-5 mile loop

Thanks to Worthys History Group, Worthys Conservation Volunteers and Peter Clarke and Chris Cornell railway historians for some of below information

The Worthys villages date back to Saxon times ('wordie' part of an estate or well defined area) and are mentioned in the Domesday Book. Probably part of a royal estate, which may date back to Roman times as they are on the line of the Roman road from Silchester to Winchester.(A33): KW was a tithing of Barton Stacey, held first by King Edward then King William – hence regal name 'Kings'

- **Eversley Park** interpretation board: Lord Eversley cabinet minister lived at Abbots Worthy House. A Whig: **Charles Shaw-Lefevre** 1794 –1888. One of longest serving speakers House of Commons 1839-57. An early advocate of public access to open spaces & footpaths
- **Lovedon Lane** TRAFFIC WARNING!! c 1865 bridge over original deep cutting of Mid-Hants line. In filled by M3 chalk waste 1973+ Look over bridge to SE: line of fir trees is the old Mid-Hants railway line to Alton.
- **Broadview and Kim Bishop Way**: Once a deep cutting of the Mid Hants Railway. Gifted to parish 1993 2004 Worthys Conservation Volunteers improved habitats.2005 free standing mosaic designed & made by the Worthys Local History Group look to middle distance to see site of the villa( on private land near Woodhams farm) A carved stone table top found on the site now in Winchester City Museum. Good vantage point for the 2 railways comprising the WW trail.
- **Artefacts**: Look for a single unused telegraph pole lower Broadview on N side before Wesley Rd crossing to Kim Bishop Way. Along K B Way is an old concrete building called a 'fog man's hut'. During reduced visibility, fog/snow a detonator was placed on track as warning device for the junction ahead. Once detonated, a man would replace it before the next train. A green signal box is partly visible on the south side west of the bridge over Springvale Rd

### Victorian Railway Wars

1. **1865 The Alton- Alresford- Winchester or Mid- Hants Railway** opened
  - To compete with the London-Basingstoke-Winchester line. The nickname **Watercress Line** became popular as production of this fragile crop boomed once the railway offered fast transport to London. Watercress, whilst gathered by local people for centuries, was not systematically farmed in KW area before the 1950.
  - Track celebrities: Edward Knight, Jane Austen's nephew, an early railway director. Charles Kingsley wrote part of the 'The Water Babies' in the Plough Inn (1882). Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary in World War 1, travelled to his fishing retreat via Itchen Abbas station.
  - In the 1930s economic depression, and the increasing popularity of road transport, reduced passenger and goods use. World War II created a brief resurgence for military traffic.
  - 1973: line closed after a decade of objections to Beeching cuts. The track was ripped out, Itchen Abbas station demolished. The land was sold for farming, a few houses and the M3. Most of the 7 miles was abandoned to wildlife, with some cuttings becoming landfill sites.
  - 1977 -1985: Enthusiasts opened 10 of the original 17 miles for heritage trains between Alresford- Alton. Train drivers still swap a token at stations to ensure safety on the single track Watercress Line.
  - 2012 Hampshire County Council granted walkers and cyclists access to the mile stretch you are now on. Local volunteers cleared the 're-wilded' track bed.
  - 2015 The Watercress Way charity was formed 2 6 mile circular trail linking this and the DN&SR railway by historic droves.
2. **The Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway** (DN&SR) in two stages, in 1882 and 1885
  - It was a cross-country railway running north-south as an independent route to Southampton for heavy traffic from the Midlands and North of England to the Southampton port. Money ran out, the traffic never materialised, and the line was overly dependent on larger railways—the Great Western Railway( which took it over 1923) and London & SW Railway
  - WW2 increased its importance: huge volumes of munitions and troops were transported to South Coast ports, particularly for D Day landings. The Didcot- Newbury section was doubled, while the southern section was upgraded with extended passing loops.

- The line never carried heavy passenger volumes and declining traffic led to its closure in stages from 1960 to 1964
- Kings Worthy Railway Station opened 1909, closed in 1960. Worthy Sand and Ballast was the goods yard. The station and the track later formed the route of the A34. The railway track to the north of the Oxdrove at Christmas Hill cutting became a landfill site.

Visible looking west between South Wonston Oxdrove-Worthy Down Platforms :

- **Old Winchester Racecourse** : It is partly covered by the recreation ground and Worthy Down Army camp.
- A popular horse racing venue for c. 300 years. Earliest race record was 1664, the last in 1887. The Grandstand was dismantled 1917 – partly used for Racecourse Cottages. Charles II Royal patronage and one of the most prestigious prizes was the Royal Plate granted by George II . The Hampshire gentry and Winchester townspeople flocked to the races in great numbers, even more with the coming of the railways in the 1840's. This was a highlight of the Winchester social scene. Lunways Inn used.
- From 2017 **Worthy Down aerodrome** had a series of military uses & became one of the major military aerodromes in UK ,famous for spitfire R &D and HMS Kestrel ( Lord HawHaw thought it sank propaganda WW2). Celebrities include 'Bomber' A T Harris & Laurence Olivier, billeted at Headbourne Worthy at 'Headlands' . Requisitioned in 1917 by War Office for the Wireless & Observers School of the Royal Flying Corps (pre RAF) the RAF then Fleet Air Arm occupied the site. In 1960 the airfield finally closed (uphill runways) and it became the Royal Army Pay Corps and now is a training camp for RAF, Navy & Army after huge expansion 2016. . Still visible: Black Dutch Hanger, used by foldable wing airplanes A large defence system was hastily built 1940/1 when there was a real threat of invasion from Europe. Bofors gun towers, Link slit trenches, Pickett-Hamilton forts ( machine gun positions peculiar to airfields) and 20 pill boxes. Many are still visible today in KW and Headbourne Worthy; substantial concrete structures, squat with small windows built to withstand blasts. Some have a brick shell as at Racehorse Bridge (named after racecourse closed). Most are Type 22, situated in open fields, hidden amongst scrub in hedgerows and woods, semi-buried in the ground, a few in private gardens, and one even built around a now dead oak tree. Since the war many pillboxes have been abandoned but are wildlife havens. One was set up as a bat sanctuary.
- Worthy Down Halt built during World War 1 to service the needs of the nearby Royal Flying Corps aerodrome but had minimal use after 1918 until the build up to the invasion of Europe in June 1944 meant expansion needed. Closed 1960 followed by the freight line in 1964 from Government Beeching cuts. Last building standing: on the platform a red brick built hut: Admiralty Store-presumably associated with Naval airdrome. Originally a metal canopy would have been here for passengers waiting area.
- The Worthy's Conservation Volunteers now helped by Watercress Way volunteers, ensure a diversity of habitats, have created vistas, and benches. 2019+ Alresford Rotary Club grant for more benches and listening posts. Look for rare wild liquorice (on southern ramp up to platforms), newly planted hedges to help screen off Worthy Down barracks & improve wildlife corridor. Entrance to Worthy Down Lane newly cleared: with railway artefacts visible (track).The platforms are effectively a raised flower bed. Dry acidic soils unlike normal calcareous soils on chalk(from tarmac and clinker and protective silver birches)

**Double bridges** Imposing red brick double bridge where the track divides. Nearest to Tesco side( east) built in 1943 to carry the new track to the mainline London line. The western bridge carries the original DN&SL south to Kings Worthy halt.

**Woodhams Farm** 500m east scheduled monument: Romano-British ."Banjo" enclosures are lightly defended settlement sites of the middle Iron Age (400-100BC), some being occupied as late as the Roman Conquest. They are rare nationally, mainly found in Wessex, relatively small in area, predominantly sub-circular in outline with a single, markedly elongated, entrance passageway; this funnelled approach giving the ground plan the appearance of a banjo or frying pan. Villas range 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> C AD house + agricultural outbuildings and related enclosures and ancillary structures. The field system = 3 cultivation terraces, following contours of the dry valley. The westernmost of the terraces adjoins the circular "banjo" enclosure. 1925 excavations: pillared hypocaust and two tessellated floors. Site to the South of Woodhams Farm lane excavations 2019 pre house building