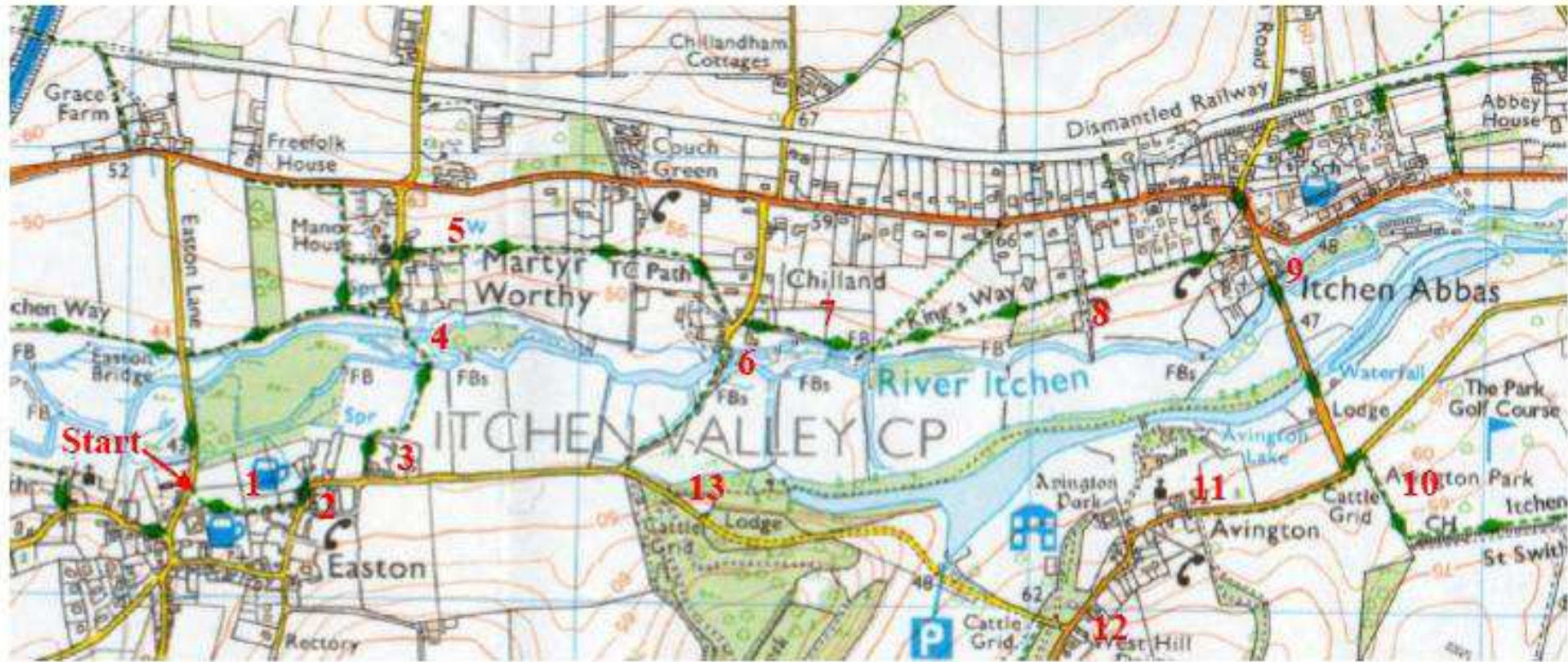


Worthy Walk 8: Itchen Abbas Loop

This is a longer walk than usual but there are shortcuts! Either start at St Mary's as detailed in November's magazine or for a shorter version, take your car to Easton. From Easton the circuit is approx. 5 miles (there is a further shortcut at point (6)). Please be aware that these paths can be very muddy in places!



Worthy Walk 8: Itchen Abbas Loop

Enter Easton from the Itchen valley road. You could park near the river. Shortly afterwards there is a footpath sign on your left beside the entrance to "The Farmyard" (1). Follow this path across a couple of paddocks and emerge from a narrow passage on to the road beside The Chestnut Horse (2). Resisting temptation, turn left and follow the road until you see a track and a green footpath sign on your left by a sign to a house called Flint Cottage (3). Follow the path keeping the fenceline on your left to reach a couple of footbridges and Martyr Worthy beyond.

(4) *It's good to loiter on the bridge and wonder if the Itchen has changed much since the 19th C when Charles Kingsley visited. He is said to have been inspired by it for the setting of his famous novel "The WaterBabies." The reason the Itchen is so clear is because it travels over chalk – the rain soaks into the aquifer rather than flooding the fields – unlike clay.*

Continue up the tarmac road, turn right opposite St. Swithun's Church (5) and walk in front of the Village Hall. Continue in a straight line across several fields before turning right along the bottom of gardens and emerging on to Chilland Lane. The path carries on between a fence and wall but turn right for a brief detour to the river at Chilland Mill (6).

There are good views of the river from the footbridge and some interesting flood plain flora and fauna alongside the footpath beyond. You could continue along that footpath till you reach the road and then turn right, back to Easton thus reducing your walk by approx. 2 miles.

The present mill was built in about 1780 and was used for grinding corn until 1897. The water is used to power a recently restored turbine which used to generate the newfangled electricity for nearby houses. It is possible to see the mill leat (the artificial watercourse) and head and tailraces(carrying water to and from the waterwheel). The building has, in recent decades been used for a variety of purposes, workshops, pottery and now a recreational space.

(7) Retrace your steps to find a footpath between the fence and the wall – carry on until you are through a gate and out into the field beyond. Avoid the left hand path instead take the one ahead of you, slightly uphill, keeping the fence on your lefthandside. As the right of way does not go beside the river please do not go that way. After crossing a couple of fields you will see an avenue of limes ahead – just before you reach them there is a wooded enclosure with a small gate on your right. Walk across and through the gate (8).

You are now on the site of the fishing cottage of Sir Edward and Lady Dorothy Grey. Sir Edward



was our longest serving Foreign Minister and was in office for 11 consecutive years including the start of World War 1. He is probably best known for saying "The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime". This cottage was their weekend and holiday refuge from the stress of Office.They would travel down from London on the train (see p19) – here they fished, walked, cycled, birdwatched and wrote their nature diary – reproduced later as "The

Cottage Book. The timber and corrugated iron building burnt down in 1922 and the site is now kept as a small nature reserve by Kings Worthy resident Pat Brockway on behalf of Winchester College. Have a rest on the seat which was donated by the Worthys Local History Group .

Go back across the field and rejoin the footpath, crossing over the lime avenue. Please do not go up or down the avenue as it is private.

Follow the footpath between the wire fence and the bottoms of various gardens until you come to the tarmac road (9) in Itchen Abbas. Should you need sustenance turn left for The Trout if not, turn right at the road by St. John the Baptist Church – also worth a visit if you have time. Continue along the tarmac road, crossing the River Itchen again and past the entrance to Avington House. At the grassy triangle (10) go left for a very short distance and into the golf course where you follow the footpath immediately on your right – doing this avoids a hazardous walk along the road. As you enter the village on the right is a gem of Georgian architecture (11). *If it's unlocked, have a look inside this unrestored red brick church built between 1768-71. There you will find high box pews of Spanish mahogany, a triple-decker pulpit, musicians' gallery and conspicuous hat pegs – you rather expect Jane Austen characters to appear at any moment.*

As you continue walking through the village you will notice a picturesque row of estate cottages complete with communal well – now planted with flowers. This terrace only seems to have access from the front so it must be inconvenient to have a load of manure delivered for the back garden.

As you leave the village turn right at the signpost for Easton and Winchester (12) and follow the road over a cattle grid and into Avington Park. There are good views of the Lake with the House behind it and it's a favourite place for birdwatchers. As you walk up the hill towards the Easton Lodge, way down in the trees on your right and well away from any public access is Nell Gwynn's Bath House. *The association between Nell Gwynn and Avington reputedly results from the time in 1683 that King Charles 2nd brought Nell to his beloved Winchester only to find that Bishop Ken refused to allow the King's mistress to stay at the Bishop's Palace. To the rescue came George Brydges one of Charles' courtiers and owner of Avington, who enlarged the house and is understood to have built a lavishly tiled bath house in the privacy of the woods for them.*

Continue past the lodge (13) and follow the road back to Easton but this time you could walk through the village, past The Chestnut Horse, and by The Cricketers.

Derek Brockway 8/2/2012