

WESTON COLLEY

You are here

A Rural Hamlet

Weston Colley is a peaceful riverside hamlet of about 20 dwellings, separated from Micheldever by a high Victorian railway embankment which was built by a workforce of over a thousand navvies to carry the London-Southampton railway at a consistent gradient across the Dever Valley.

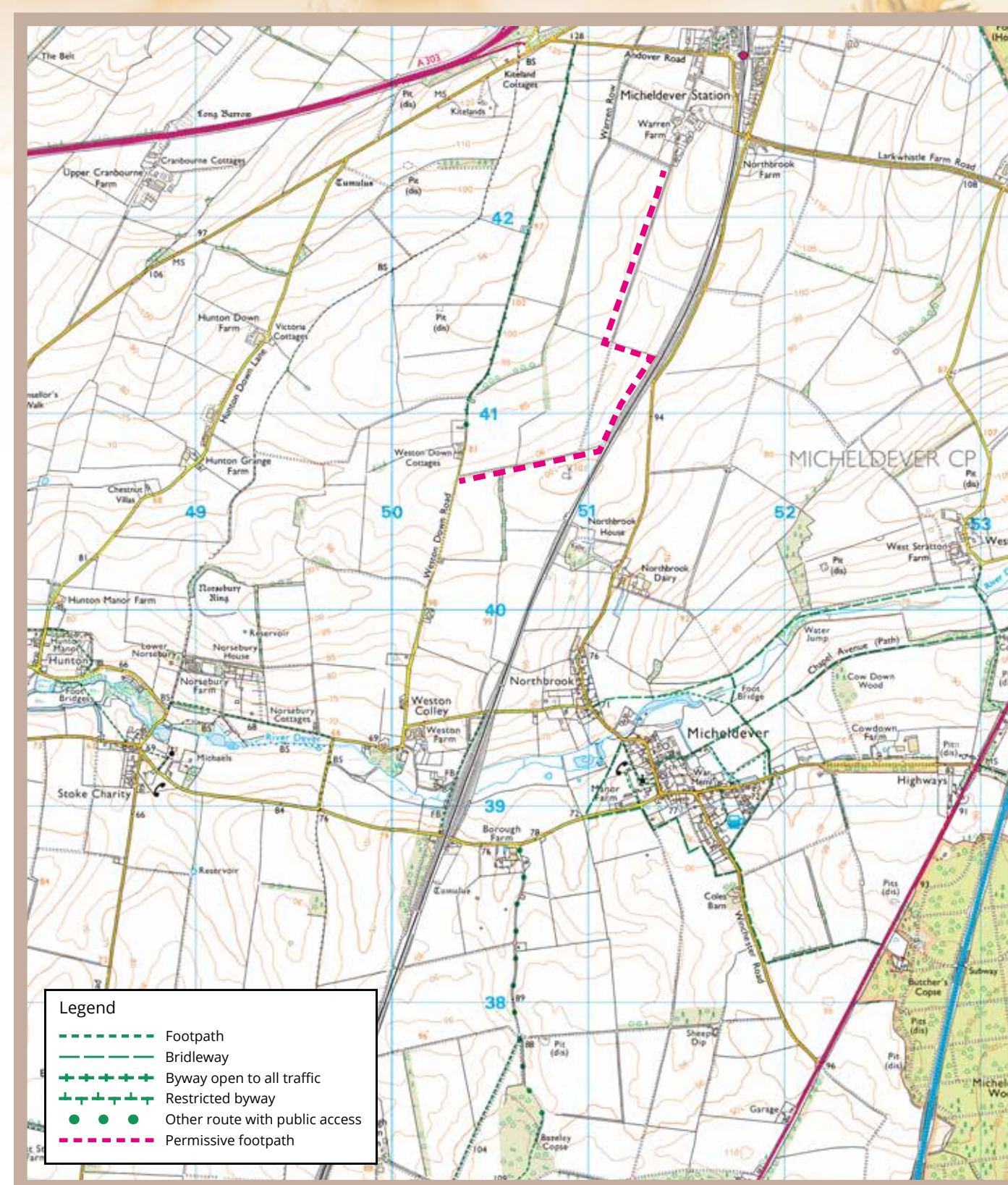
There has been settlement here for many centuries. Archaeologists have discovered 5th century burials near the railway, including that of a woman whose high-status grave goods included a Frankish brooch and eastern European beads.

'Weston' means a place to the west of Micheldever and is the name that appears on maps between the 16th and 19th centuries. It is unclear when the additional name 'Colley' came into common usage, but it appears on maps by the late 19th century. In Old English, 'col' denotes charcoal, and 'lea' can mean a clearing, so it is likely that charcoal burning was an activity that regularly took place in this area by that time. Charcoal burners would harvest wood locally and camp by the charcoal clamps, or kilns, that they built for converting it into charcoal. This was a slow-burning process that took several watchful days.

Farming and Milling

From the 10th century Weston Colley was farmed as part of the estate belonging to the New Minster in Winchester, and it is still surrounded by farmland today.

A watermill serving Micheldever manor was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 and was probably located where Mill Cottage stands today. Its ongoing importance is signified by the presence of this small hamlet on the earliest county maps. Through the centuries local farmers relied on this mill to grind their grain, and it was operated as



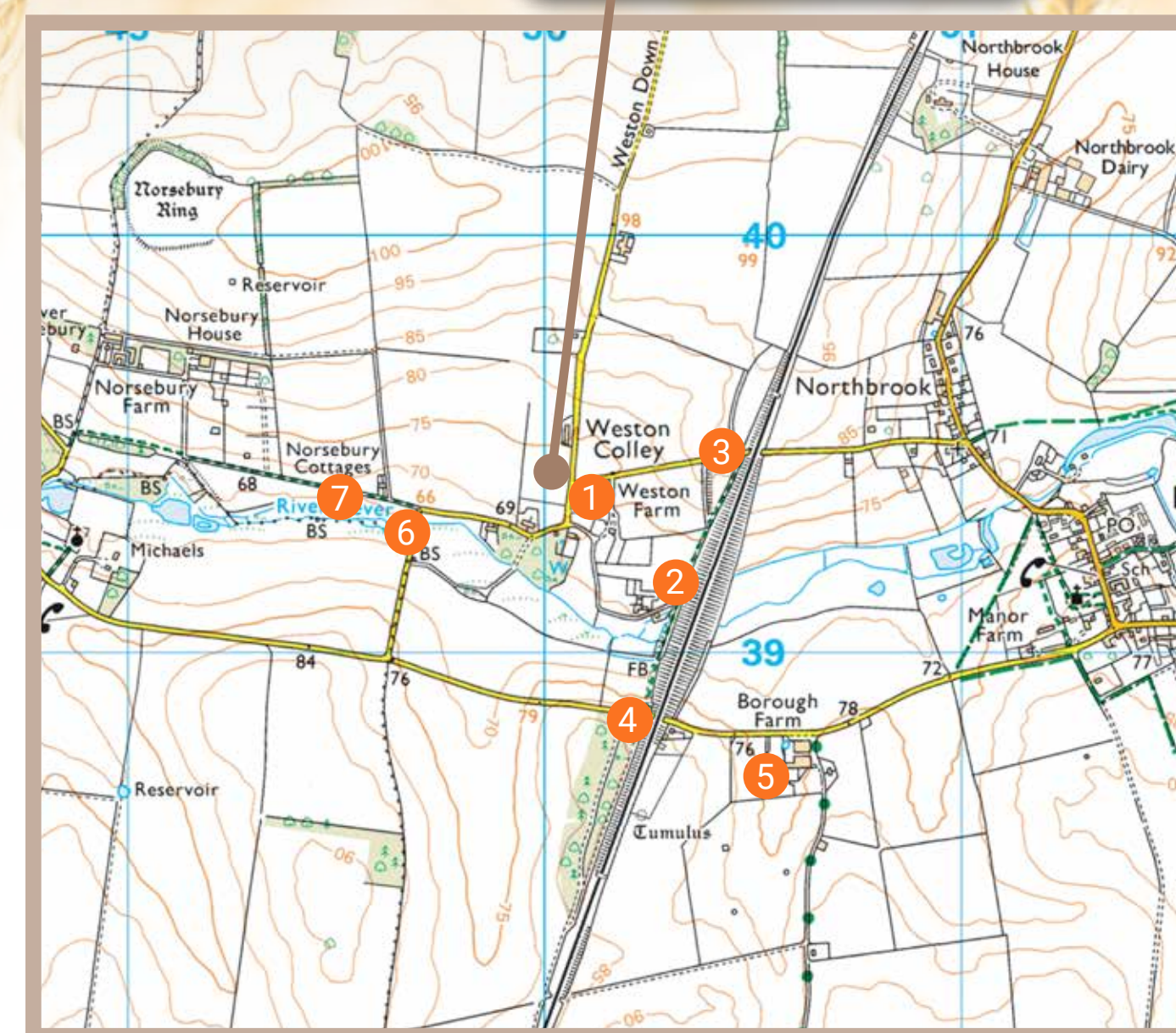
an essential local facility until the late 19th century. The mill building can only be viewed from the railway embankment path, but here you can see the old economic heart of the community – Weston Farm ① – and a neighbouring 16th century thatched and timber-framed house which has been divided into two cottages.

Along the River Dever

The Dever, a tributary of the Test, is a gin-clear chalk stream – tumbling over the gravel as the chalk aquifer overflows in the winter and spring, but sometimes reduced to a mere trickle by summer's end. Its valley provides a wildlife corridor through Weston Colley.



- Watercress has escaped into the river here from upstream beds, but don't be taken in by the unrelated 'fool's watercress' which dominates.
- Sticklebacks can be seen in the river, but you are less likely to spot the bullhead (miller's thumb) or stone loach that are so well camouflaged on the gravel bottom and only



venture out into open water under cover of darkness. Eel (plentiful 20 years ago) and brown trout are rarely seen this far upstream nowadays.

- Mallards, coots, egrets and herons are common sights, and barn owls can be seen hunting at dusk.
- Cattle and deer drink at the water's edge, and water voles forage along the banks. Small rodents are plentiful, and you might catch a glimpse of a stoat on the hunt.
- In the fields, a hare or deer will sometimes raise its head, whilst buzzards, sparrowhawks and kites are often spotted overhead.
- Field margins around here are generally left uncultivated so that the rich native flora of chalk downland, and associated insects, can thrive.

If you spot any unusual wildlife, the Dever Society would love to hear from you on admin@deversociety.org.



iStock.com



Walks

A pretty wooded footpath runs alongside the railway embankment between the two arches that carry trains high above the local lanes. Look out for the Dever emerging in two channels from the culverts that carry it, unimpeded, under the embankment. One channel forms the millstream; the 16th century mill cottage can be glimpsed from the small footbridge ②. Snowdrops line the river bank here in February.



From the northern railway arch ③, Weston Lane leads to Northbrook, with panoramic views of the upper Dever valley along the way. From the southern arch ④, a 400m stroll eastwards brings you to the magnificent 17th century barns of Borough Farm ⑤ and the path to ancient Bazeley Copse.

Take a moment to enjoy the views upstream and downstream from Weston Colley's little road bridge ⑥ before following the footpath westwards from the kissing gate ⑦ along the valley to Stoke Charity, with its picturesque medieval church overlooking the water and its charming thatched cottages.

For the furthest vistas, take the lane (becoming a grass track) that heads north from Weston Farm to Micheldever Station. Fields of ripening grain stretch across the downs in all directions, making a splendid sight as they dance in the breeze.



Find out more about Micheldever parish at:

