

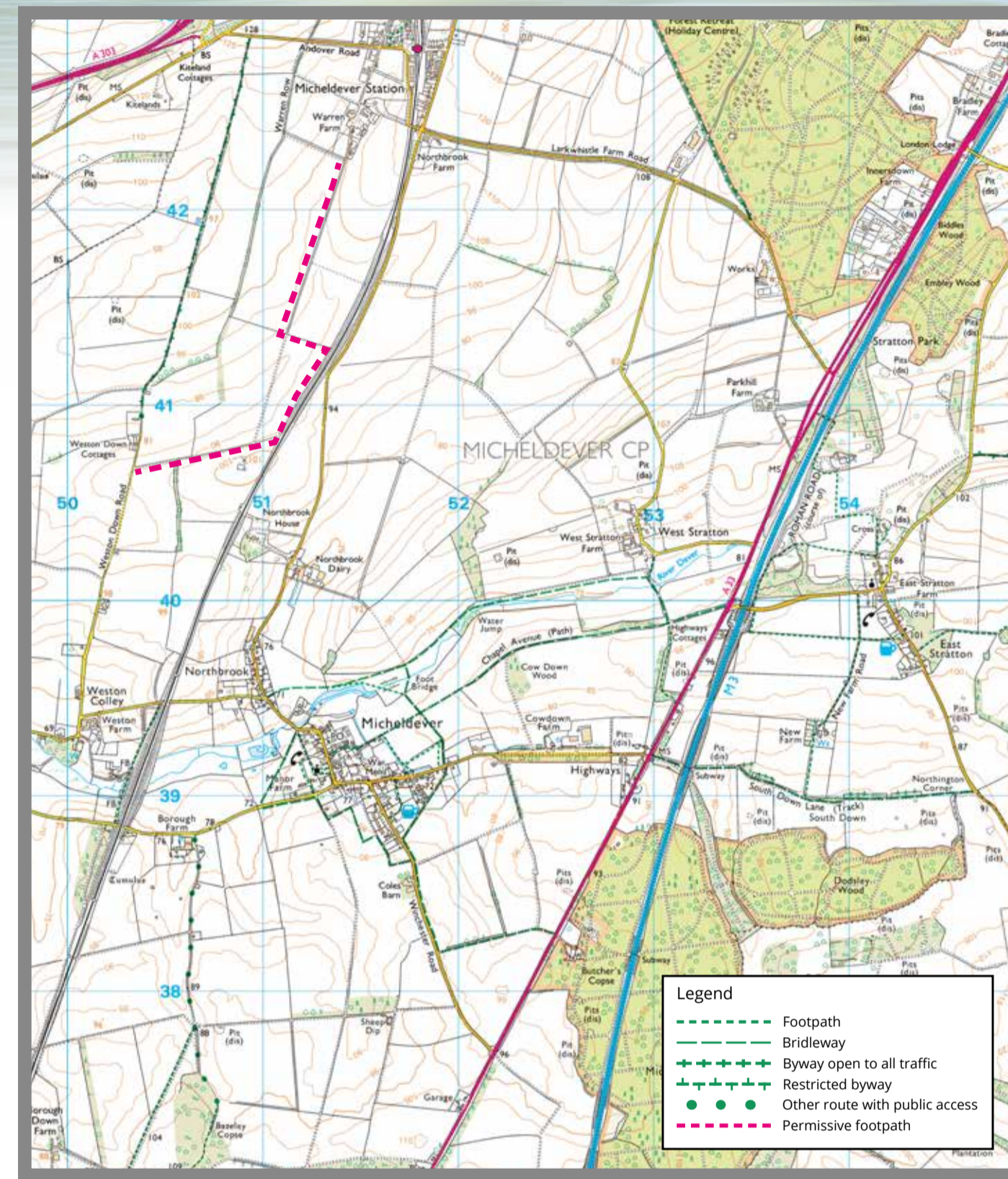
# MICHELDEVER

## A Brief History

There is evidence of continuous occupation at Micheldever (pronounced 'mitcheldever') from prehistoric times (notably Iron Age banjo enclosures and Norsebury Ring hillfort). Micheldever was owned by King Alfred the Great, then given to the New Minster (in Winchester) in 903. It was surrendered to King Henry VIII in 1538 on the dissolution of the monasteries, and sold in 1544 to the 1st Earl of Southampton, who had a substantial manor house built in the village. Since 1801, the Baring family have been major landowners. It has many pretty half-timbered and thatched houses, some of which once served the village as bakehouse, post office, butcher, smithy and forge. The oldest is Shillingbury Cottage, dating from 1463, which stands at The Crease (possibly a corruption of 'the cross'). **1**



- 2** The Church of St Mary the Virgin has Saxon origins but the current church tower was built in the 13th century, with the unusual octagon added to the nave in 1806. It hosts some interesting burials, including poor Henry Cook. During the 1830 'Swing Riots' (an uprising against low wages and the new threshing machines) he aimed a sledgehammer at William Bingham Baring and hit his hat, and was hanged for attempted murder.
- 3** The Half Moon and Spread Eagle, a beautiful old drovers' inn dating back to 1703, was purchased for the village in 2019 to be run as a community hub.
- 4** The school was erected in 1845, funded by the Baring family, and sports a striking clock tower that was added in 1870.
- 5** The War Memorial commemorates those who fell in both World Wars, including Doris Lay (National Fire Service), who was killed in the 1943 bombing raid on Winchester.



## River Dever

The river (pronounced 'deever') rises east of the old Roman road (now the A33) in Stratton Park, joined by a winterbourne to the south. It flows west to join the Test near Wherwell.

It is commonly accepted that the name Micheldever is derived from the Celtic for 'Much Water' but here the river is little more than a brook, dividing the village into the early settlements of Northbrook and Southbrook.



The river is fed by springs rising from the aquifers at a constant temperature of 10°C, the clear, chalk-filtered water supporting an ecosystem that is unique to Hampshire chalk streams. In the past, the river provided water for grazing meadows, growing sedge for a thriving basket and mat-making industry, and growing watercress. Watercress was a vital part of the village economy in the 19th century and it was cultivated in specially constructed gravel ponds **6** fed by chalk springs and boreholes. The watercress was harvested by hand, washed, trimmed and packed into bundles to be taken to Micheldever station and on to the London market.



## Walks

The footpaths surrounding Micheldever were used in Saxon times by smallholders returning their livestock from the fields, and they form an ancient ring road which can be accessed from any corner of this field. The entire route around the village is just over three kilometres (or combine footpaths with village roads to create shorter walks). Break your stroll at the Half Moon and Spread Eagle pub.



Footpaths also radiate out from Micheldever to surrounding villages and hamlets. One leads north via Weston Colley to Micheldever Station, with far-reaching views across gently rolling Hampshire farmland. Westwards, Stoke Charity and Hunton provide beautiful riverside walks with a wealth of native plants. To the east is Micheldever Wood, renowned for its springtime bluebells, and the pretty villages of East Stratton and Woodmancott. Peaceful Bazeley Copse lies to the south, and beyond it the Alresford Drove footpath (part of The Watercress Way).



## You are here

This board is situated where Cow Down meets Duke (once Duck) Street; the development of the street names reflects the importance of agriculture in shaping the village. The playing field before you was presented to the village by Lord Rank of the Rank Organisation (film and food empires), a local businessman and philanthropist.

## Coffin Walk

For several centuries St Mary's Church provided the burial ground for surrounding hamlets as well as Micheldever (the churchyard at East Stratton was regularly waterlogged, making it unsuitable until a new church was built in 1888). The deceased were conveyed through woods and fields, then along Chapel Avenue **7** to St Mary's, often by the local carpenters who made the coffins. You can still see the most recent bier in St Mary's, and walk this evocative two-kilometre path towards East and West Stratton, known locally as 'Coffin Walk'.



## Wildlife

The chalk downland on which Micheldever lies supports a globally rare and fragile ecosystem. Although arable farming has diminished the natural grasslands, there are still sightings of protected bats, otters, water voles and dormice. Also watch out for:

- Small mammals (pygmy shrews, stoats, polecats), as well as rabbits, hares, foxes and roe deer.
- Numerous bird species, including barn, tawny and little owls, herons, buzzards, and spectacular kingfishers.
- Several types of dragonfly and butterfly; purple emperors, dark green fritillaries and chalkhill blues are particularly special.
- Minnow, stickleback, bullhead and stone loach fish, fed by insects such as stonefly, mayfly and caddisfly. Invasive North American signal crayfish have now replaced the native white-clawed crayfish.

Birds that are now rare include lapwings, skylarks, yellowhammers and linnets, as are these wildflowers: prickly poppy, harebell, common rockrose and Carlina thistle. If you spot any unusual wildlife, the Dever Society would love to hear from you on [admin@deversociety.org](mailto:admin@deversociety.org).

Micheldever retains a strong sense of community. Find out more about the village and events at:

