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6 January 2007			
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## Winchester Circular

**Length:** 16.3km (10.2 miles)

**Shorter options:** 14km (8.7 miles) and 10km (6.2 miles)

**Toughness:** 4: there are two steep ascents, one short, one longer; otherwise gradients are gentle

**Transport:** Winchester is served by up to four trains an hour out of Waterloo: journey time is about one hour.

**Suggested train:** Catch the nearest train to 9.30am (that is the nearest FAST train: one stopping at Basingstoke and Woking only en route: there are also some slower trains, stopping at more intermediate points)

**Maps:** OS Landranger 185, Explorer 132

**Walk notes** Winchester is a cathedral city steeped in history. It was founded by the Romans close to a major iron age hillfort, it was the capital of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex under Alfred the Great, it was a major royal city under the medieval kings, and it is the home of one of the country's most famous public schools, Winchester College.

This walk takes in all of its major points of interest and some of its prettiest streets. It then carries on out along the idyllic River Itchen to St Catherines Hill, the iron age hillfort, from where there are spectacular views of the city. From here the route crosses some typical Hampshire downland, before descending to a section of ancient watermeadows and to a newly refurbished riverside pub for lunch.

In the afternoon, the walk again climbs up onto the downs, giving fine distant views of Winchester Cathedral, before descending to the ancient Hospital of St Cross, along the watermeadows and past Winchester College to tea in the Cathedral refectory.

Attractive though all this is, the walk does have one disadvantage, which is noise from the M3 motorway which was insensitively – and notoriously – routed just past the city (see **The real Battle of Twyford Down** in the appendix at the end of this document). Which parts of the walk this affects to some extent depends on the direction of the wind: but only in the section around St Catherine's Hill is the noise really intrusive - and then the fine views make up for it.

**Walk options** Details of two short cuts are given at the end of the text. **The Tourist Short Cut** loops you back to Winchester after the climb up St Catherine's Hill, making a total walk of 10km (6.2 miles) and is perfect if you want to combine the walk with a detailed visit to Winchester Cathedral and its other attractions. **The River Short Cut** takes you along the Itchen watermeadows from St Catherine's Hill to the lunchtime pub in Shawford, cutting 2.3km (1.5 miles) off the morning of the walk, making the total walk 14km (8.7 miles) Both offer extremely pretty views of the watermeadows, but both also bring you right up next to the motorway at one point, with consequent heavy traffic noise. In both cases the noise fades as the short cut progresses, however.

It is also possible to **cut short the walk at Shawford**, just after the lunchtime pub, 8.3km (5.2 miles into the walk) **Trains from Shawford** station to Winchester run hourly Monday to Saturday, though there are only four trains a day on Sundays. Change at Winchester or Basingstoke for connections to London. Frequent **buses from Shawford** also go from the point just after the station indicated in the text: the B1 bus goes three times an hour Monday to Saturday and every half hour on Sunday, while the 49 or 49A is half hourly from Monday to Saturday but every two hours on Sunday. Call 023 8061 8233 to check these times

## LUNCH AND TEA PLACES

**The Bridge**, Shawford (01962 713 171) 8.3km (5.2 miles) into the walk, is a large, recently refurbished pub with an extensive menu and a garden. This is the recommended lunchstop. Though often busy, the pub is also very efficient and has plenty of tables, and serves food all afternoon, to 10.00pm Mondays to Saturdays and to 9.30pm on Sundays

**St Cross Hospital** (an ancient almshouse: see **History**) has a small cafe (tel 01962 851 375) on the left just beyond the gatehouse, which is open April to the end of September from 10.30am to 12.30pm, and 2.30pm to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, and sometimes at weekends.

**Winchester Cathedral Rectory** is a modern visitor centre, with a large self service restaurant and tea room open 9.30am to 5pm daily. This is the recommended tea stop, but if you are doing the **Tourist Short Cut** and spending the morning or afternoon in Winchester seeing the sights, it is also an excellent choice for lunch.

If you are too late for the Cathedral Rectory, there are lots of **other tea options** in Winchester. Just before you emerge into the High Street on the return leg of the walk, immediately on your right, behind the Buttercross is **Pasty Presto**, which despite its unfortunate name has a nice selection of cakes and a half timbered tea room upstairs where the author of this walk spent many a teenage Saturday afternoon (It was The Spinning Wheel in those days...). It is open till 6pm Monday to Saturday and 5.30pm on Sunday. Across the High Street from this is **Cafe Nero**, which is open till 7pm Monday to Saturday, and 6pm Sunday. Just a bit earlier, on the

right hand side of the small unnamed road leading from The Square to the Buttercross **Cafe Monde** is open till 6pm daily and 5pm on Sunday.

**Pub** choices, all serving tea and coffee, include the cosy **Wykeham Arms** just before the Kingsgate (where some of the tables are former Winchester College schoolroom desks: this pub also serves nice food), and in The Square, just as you leave the Cathedral grounds, **The Vine Inn** to your left, and the half timbered **Eclipse Inn** ahead right.

## HISTORY

**Winchester** was founded by the Romans, on site which commanded a ford of the River Itchen, and nearby a major Celtic hillfort, now called **St Catherine's Hill**. The city was originally known as Venta Belgarum (the Belgae being the local Celtic tribe), which became Wintoncaster in the Saxon period, and then Winchester.

The city was the capital of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex in the days of Alfred the Great (ninth century). He was buried in the Old Minster, the Saxon cathedral, but his bones were later moved to Hythe Abbey and lost in the Dissolution of the Monasteries. However the bones of other Saxon kings who made Winchester their capital, including the famous Canute (of hold back the tide fame) are still preserved in the cathedral.

Even after England was united in the tenth century, Winchester remained a kind of second capital after London: Edward the Confessor, for example, was crowned there. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, William the Conqueror also made the town a major royal residence, building a palace in the town and a castle above the city which in its day was as important as Windsor is today. William's successor, William Rufus, who was killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest, was buried in Winchester Cathedral, and Henry III (1216-1272) was born in Winchester and spent most of his life there. (He was known as "Henry of Winchester")

Given its importance as a royal residence, the bishop of Winchester in medieval times was also a powerful figure in the land, and the cathedral is full of the tombs of bishops who were brothers of the king, chancellors of England, or key royal advisors.

Winchester's importance came to an end as a result of the English Civil War in the 1600s, however. The city was not surprisingly a royalist stronghold, but was captured by Oliver Cromwell in 1642. He bombarded the town with cannon placed on a hill still called Oliver's Battery to this day. The bombardment shattered the great west window of the cathedral, and Cromwell later rode his horse into the cathedral, scattered the bones of the Saxon Kings, and used the building as a stables.

When the monarchy was restored, Charles II planned a massive palace on the hill behind the now destroyed castle: it was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and might have become a major royal residence, had it been completed. But Charles died before construction was finished, and his successor, James II, did not care for Winchester. The palace became a barracks, and later burnt down. Winchester reverted to being a quiet country town.

The city has one more melancholy claim to fame, however, as the place where novelist **Jane Austen** died. She was brought to a house in College Street (passed near the end of this walk, but not open to the public) for medical treatment in May

1817, and died in in the arms of her beloved sister Cassandra in the house on 18 July 1817, aged just 41.

Cassandra wrote: "I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, a friend as never can have been surpassed. She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow. I had not a thought concealed from her, and it is as if I had lost a part of myself." Jane was buried in Winchester Cathedral for no other reason than that she was a daughter of a clergyman, and because it would have been impractical to move her body back to the village of Chawton, where she lived with her sister and mother. Cassandra, as a woman, was not allowed to attend the funeral.

**The Great Hall**, passed on this walk, is all that remains of the medieval castle of Winchester. It was built around 1235 by Henry III, and is one of the best preserved medieval buildings in the country. This was the banqueting hall of the castle, and its walls would have been hung with coats of arms and tapestries. Sir Walter Raleigh was condemned to death here in 1603. High on the wall in the Hall is **King Arthur's Round Table**, which was actually made by Edward I to try and create a spirit of unity amongst his barons, and painted during Tudor times (it is Henry VIII who is depicted as Arthur). The hall is open from 10am to 5pm from February to October, and 10am to 5pm the rest of the year, and admission is free.

The **Westgate** and **Kingsgate**, both passed on this walk, are the survivors of five medieval gates of Winchester. The others were demolished in the 18th century, or fell down – the Northgate, for example, collapsed while it was being used for a wedding party. The insides of both the surviving gates can be visited. The **Westgate** has a small museum on its upper floor (open February to October from 10am to 5pm, or from 12pm to 5pm on Sundays) and pleasant enough views from its roof, where holes for pouring boiling oil can be seen.

The **Kingsgate**, on the site of the Roman South Gate, is surprisingly topped by a 13th century chapel of St Swithun (in medieval times, this was a common way to use the space above city gates, but the Kingsgate is now a very rare survivor). The entrance to the chapel (assuming you are visiting it towards the end of this walk) is on the left just after you have passed under the arch. At the top of the stairs, just after you enter the chapel, look out for the touching memorial plaque up on the wall to your right to William Widemore, "an honest Englishman".. "who was (which is most rare) a friend without guile."

The current **Winchester Cathedral** dates back to 1079, when it was started by Bishop Walkelin shortly after the Norman Conquest: the transepts are unchanged since that time. But even before the Norman building, there had been a cathedral – called the Old Minster - on this site for over four hundred years. Its ground plan can be seen laid out in the graveyard to the left of the west front. The grassy area in front of the cathedral has an even earlier origin as the forum (central square) of the Roman city. Though lacking the dramatic unity of architecture and soaring spire of the more visited Salisbury (a bit of local rivalry coming out here), the cathedral is full of historic interest, and well worth a visit. See **A short tour of Winchester Cathedral** in the appendix at the very end of this document for a guided tour. The cathedral is open to the public until around 5pm, and these days you often have to pay a £4 entrance fee to go inside, but if go late in the afternoon or on a quiet day, you may be lucky and get in for free.

Incidentally, if you are only interested in a quick photograph of the cathedral, the best place is up the hill from the west front, by the railings and in front of the fine Georgian house. On your way back to the west front, look for a famous tombstone among the graves to your right to a grenadier who died from "a violent fever contracted by drinking small beer when hot". There is much speculation about whether it was hot beer or a hot grenadier that was at fault.

**St Catherine's Hill** is a fine example of a Celtic iron age hillfort, and later in the walk you get to appreciate what a magnificent fortified position it must have been. The rampart and ditch of the fort are still in evidence, and the crown of trees at the top of the hill has a rather mystical feel, perhaps because they grow on the site of a medieval chapel. The **Mizmaze** on the hill (passed on the walk) is a complete mystery. Some say it is ancient, perhaps a penance for monks, while others reckon it is more modern. Local tradition preserves something of the penitential flavour by suggesting it was carved with a penknife by a naughty schoolboy from Winchester College, sent up onto the hill as a punishment

The **watermeadows** are a precious rarity, as they show signs (visible from the top of St Catherine's Hill) of ancient medieval (or even Celtic?) field systems. In their natural state they would have been marshier, and seasonally flooded, but in medieval times they were drained by a clever system of rivers and channels on different levels, which still remain in use to this day, and which can be seen in several places on this walk. The section from St Cross Hospital (see below) to Winchester is said to have inspired the poet John Keat's ode *To Autumn*, which contains the famous line "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness". Incredibly, in the 1970s, the Department of Transport tried to build the M3 through these meadows (See **The Real Battle of Twyford Down** in the appendix at the very end of this document).

**St Cross Hospital** (01962 851 375) is an almshouse founded in 1136 by Bishop Henry de Blois, and expanded in 1446 by Bishop Henry de Beaufort. 25 "distressed gentlemen" still live there, and can be seen around the town wearing either the black robes of de Blois or the red robes of de Beaufort. You can still ask at the porter's lodge for the "Wayfarer's Dole", a square of bread and a thimbleful of mead (it is quite a big thimble, mind). The attached **St Cross Church** dates from 1131 and is a wonderful landmark from the surrounding hills. The Church and its complex can be visited 9.30am to 5pm Monday to Saturday and 1pm to 5pm on Sundays from 1 April to 31 October: at other times of the year it is open 10.30am to 3.30pm Mondays to Saturdays only

**Winchester College** was founded by Bishop William of Wykeham (college old boys are called Wykehamists) in 1387 to cater for needy scholars. As one of the country's leading public schools, it now caters for very rich ones, though it also has rigorous academic standards. Wykeham (whose motto was "manners maketh man") also founded New College, Oxford (one of the oldest Oxford colleges), and not surprisingly the entrance quadrangles of the school look remarkably like their Oxford counterparts. It used to be fairly easy to sneak inside from College Street (passed on this walk) to see them, but these days the gate is more closely guarded. The college does do hour long guided tours throughout the year, however. Phone 01962 621 209 or see [www.winchestercollege.co.uk](http://www.winchestercollege.co.uk). Otherwise, you get good views of the college towards the end of this walk, including its famous playing fields.

**Wolvesey Castle** was the medieval home of the powerful Bishops of Winchester, and the walls around the castle grounds still preserve a section of Winchester's

medieval city wall. The whole south eastern third of the city was essentially an massive ecclesiastical enclave. The ruins of the castle are worth a quick look if entrance is free (as it was last time I looked), but not really worth paying for. Next door is **Wolvesey Palace**, the current home of the Bishop of Winchester, which is in fact just a surviving wing of a much grander palace that once stood on the site.

The **City Mill**, which in its current form dates from the 18th century, is a National Trust property not far off the morning route. It is an actual working water mill, driven by the fast flowing river Itchen, which grinds flour that is on sale in its shop. There are also some information boards about the wildlife of the River Itchen. It is open from late May to December from 11am to 5pm daily.

See also **two appendices** to this section, which for space reasons have been put at the end of the Walk Directions: **A Short Tour of Winchester Cathedral** is a visitor's guide to this wonderful medieval basilica. **The Real Battle of Twyford Down** details the controversial history of the building of the M3 motorway past Winchester

## WALK DIRECTIONS

[1] Coming off platform two (the southbound platform) of Winchester station, exit its foyer through the sliding glass doors, and *turn right along the front of the station*, your direction 200 degrees.

In 40 metres, *at the end of the station buildings, keep straight on uphill on a paved footpath*, with a road to your left. In 200 metres, ignore the road to the right across the railway bridge, and instead *veer left down a road, signposted City Centre and Great Hall*, your direction 160 degrees.

In 90 metres, you pass a **monument to plague victims** on the left and a road merges from the left. Keep on downhill, and in 40 metres, *you come to a T-junction with the main road*. Straight ahead of you, you can see a courtyard at the end of which is the **Great Hall of Winchester Castle** (see **History**).

Assuming you don't want to visit the Great Hall, *cross the main road and turn left through the Westgate*, one of Winchester's two surviving medieval city gates (see **History**). Beyond the gate, you get a fine view of Winchester's **High Street**, and **St Giles Hill** behind, where a famous fair used to be held in medieval times.

Walk down the hill towards the High Street. In 70 metres, note a statue of horse and rider by renowned sculptor Elizabeth Frink on the right. In 80 metres more, cross Southgate Street to the right, and *keep on downhill into the High Street*. In 20 metres, you come to a pedestrianised area.

[!] In 110 metres, *just before the 15th century Buttercross* (a spire-like stone monument), *turn right under a covered passageway*. (In 10 metres, note a plaque to the right pointing out some **stones from a palace built by**

**William the Conqueror**, and in 10 metres more, note tiny **St Lawrence's Church** on the left, which was also apparently once part of the palace.)

In 50 metres more, *you come to a road T-junction: veer slightly left*, passing the **City Museum** on your left, into the cathedral grounds, keeping straight on down an avenue of trees. In 100 metres, *you come to the west front of Winchester Cathedral*. You can visit the cathedral now or at the end of the walk, but to continue the walk now, *turn right along the west front* (noting a possible lunch or tea stop, the **Cathedral Refectory**, up the steps ahead to your right).

*At the end of the west front, turn left through a buttress arch into a passageway*, signposted Wolvesey Castle and Watermeadows. Before you pass through it, note a faint Latin inscription scratched in the stone on the left of the arch at about head height: "Illac Precator" ("That way those who want to pray") pointing left and "Huic Ambulator" ("This way walkers") pointing right.

Keep on under the buttress arches of the cathedral. In 20 metres, *an open space can be seen to your right: here veer right out of the line of buttresses and carry on along the road alongside them in the same direction as before*, with a grassy area to your right. In 50 metres, follow the road around to the right, but in 10 metres *turn left under a covered arch*.

In 30 metres at the end of the passage, continue straight on, with the east end of the cathedral to your left. In another 40 metres, keep to the left of a red brick Georgian House, following the path between metal railings to your left and a stone wall to the right. (Look back at this point, and

you can see that the east end of the cathedral tilts outwards: see **History** for more on this.

In 70 metres there are walls on both sides of the path and seems to be coming to a dead end, but in 25 metres more, it *turns left through a low doorway*. In 15 metres you pass a pretty water garden to the left, a reminder that this whole part of Winchester was originally part of the River Itchen watermeadows and is still drained by a medieval system of channels (see **History**).

In another 15 metres *you come to a road, where you go right, your direction 120 degrees*. In 200 metres, *follow the road around to the left, and in 40 metres more, turn right into a tiny public garden*. In a further five metres, *go down some steps on to a walkway alongside the **River Itchen***.

(The onward route is straight on from the bottom of the steps, in the direction of the flow of the river. But if you go in the opposite direction, upstream, there are two items of historical interest. Just beyond the steps, on the left, there is a gated chamber in which is a tiny fragment of Winchester's **Roman Wall** – surely one of the most comical Roman remains in the country. If you carry on upstream for 50 metres, you also get to the **City Bridge** – the original point around which Roman Winchester was built, and beyond it is the National Trust-owned **City Mill**: see **History**).

However, **to continue the walk**, *follow the walkway downstream along the bank of the River Itchen, your direction 160 degrees*. In 150 metres, *where the path forks, keep left*, but note to your right the high stone wall. This is the wall of Winchester Cathedral Close, which is also the only remaining section of Winchester's medieval **City Wall**.

Keep to the edge of the fast-flowing Itchen (watching the amusing way the ducks somehow manage to paddle fast enough to keep stationary in the current). In 90 metres note to the right a weir, one of many that you will see throughout this walk more evidence of the medieval system put in place to drain the watermeadows (see **History**). In 50 metres more, *at a path T-junction in front of a converted mill, now a block of flats, turn left*.

In 20 metres *you come to a car park, and in 5 metres more, turn right along the side of the converted mill*. In 60 metres merge with a road coming downhill from the left. In 70 metres more, *where the road turns right, keep straight on down a tarmac driveway, signposted "Private Road, Access Only. [2]*

In 30 metres, ignore a footpath to the right marked by a yellow arrow (it is easily missed anyway), and keep on the tarmac driveway. In 60 metres more, *just past New Barge Cottages 1 & 2 to the right, fork right down a path signposted by green and yellow arrows*. In 30 metres, *curve left with the path onto the riverside*. (This is actually the former **Itchen Navigation**, rather than the Itchen itself, which explains why there is no current: note more weirs to the right, part of the medieval drainage system).

Keep along the path, with the river to the right (if it is to your left, you have turned off the tarmac drive too early) In 220 metres, a broad meadow opens up to your left, and you can see St Catherine's Hill, which you are about to climb, ahead of you to the left. In 450 metres more *you come to a bridge and a road. Cross over the road, and go (more or less) straight on into a car park*. (Just at the start of the car park look to the right and you can see the Church of St Cross, also passed towards the end of the walk, to

the right on a bearing of 230 degrees: see **History**).

In 35 metres, *at the far end of the car park, turn left under a brick arch, passing under the now long gone Great Western railway line from Newbury to Southampton. In 10 metres, you emerge from this and start climbing uphill between fences.* To the left and right of you at this point was the route of the **Winchester By-pass** (see **The real Battle of Twyford Down** in the appendix at the very end of this document), a dual carriageway which cut a big chunk out of the hill and formerly made pedestrian access to it from the city very difficult: in 1994 when the M3 opened, it was removed and the hill re-landscaped, and it is now impossible to imagine that it was ever there).

In 35 metres, *pass through a wooden gate and carry on up the path. In 10 metres, where the track enters the trees, ignore a fork to the right* (this is actually a very steep and direct way up to point [3] below, but use of it is discouraged to avoid soil erosion: if you must go this way, turn right when you get to the ramparts of the hillfort, and this will take you to point [4] below).

Keep on up a chalk path (which is very slippery when wet). In 15 metres, *curve left with the path onto a more level section with a wooden fence to the right. In 120 metres, the path turns right and climbs straight uphill on steps. In 100 metres at the top of the steps, keep straight on uphill, and 45 metres later turn left again with the path onto another more level section. In 100 metres, you emerge from the trees into the open, and go right at a crosspath. In 10 metres more, you emerge onto the hilltop.*

Keep straight on and in 20 metres, you come to an information board and 20

metres beyond it the **Mizmaze**, which is cut in the ground (see **History**). You are now inside the ramparts of the Celtic hillfort of **St Catherine's Hill**.

(If you are in a rush, you could go half left at this point, which in 90 metres would bring you to a rampart topped by scrub: going right for 70 metres would bring you to point [5], but to do this would be to miss a fine view and one of the finest bits of the walk)

**Otherwise, to continue the walk, go right and then left around the edge of the Mizmaze, and at its far corner, turn right onto a grass path which goes gently downhill.** There are various diverging paths here, but *head for St Cross Church which can be clearly seen in the valley below.*

In 100 metres, you come to a nature information board to the left: 10 metres beyond this board, just beyond the thorn tree to your right, stop to enjoy the **panoramic view [3]**.

This consists of the **Cathedral** to the right, due north, and a very clear view of the site of Winchester, at a point where the Itchen Valley narrows to an easily defensible point underneath the steep face of **St Giles Hill**. In winter you can also see **Winchester College** to the south of the Cathedral, along with **Wolvesey Palace** and **Wolvesey Castle** (see **History** for information on all of these), but in summer these are hidden by trees. Tracking southwards, the high hill opposite, direction 330 degrees, is topped by the civil trinity of **Winchester Prison** (the round toward), **Hampshire police headquarters** (the modern tower block to its right) and the **county hospital** (the low red building to the left), which was founded by Florence Nightingale, her first English hospital outside London. Further south, **St Cross Hospital and Church** can be seen clearly, as can the **watermeadows** with evidence of

their Celtic field systems. The high hill covered with housing above and to the left of St Cross is **Oliver's Battery**, from where Oliver Cromwell bombarded the cathedral and town, and lastly to the far left one can just about see and certainly hear the wretched **M3 motorway**, which was so nearly built right along the bottom of the valley you see in front of you.

*From the viewpoint, turn left, roughly following the contour of the hill on a faint grassy path, your direction 210 degrees. In 160 metres, you pass a miniature oak tree on your left and start to descend slightly. In 40 metres, fork right on a minor path off the main path (not essential, but you get a good view doing this). The M3 motorway is now visible in all its insensitive horror.*

In 90 metres, *this brings you to the ramparts*, where you again have a fine view of the watermeadows: along the base of the hill to the right was the route of the Winchester by-pass, removed in 1994 (see **The Real Battle of Twyford Down** in the appendix at the very end of this document).

*Turn left along the rampart, with **Plague Pit Valley**, the valley behind St Catherine's Hill, to your right. (It was so called because plague victims were buried there). In 15 metres, you pass some wooden steps going downhill. [4]*

**To take the River Short Cut or the Tourist Short Cut**, turn right down these steps and refer to the directions at the end of the main text.

**To continue on the main walk**, keep straight on along the ramparts. In 160 metres, *just before some bushes on the right hand side of the rampart, fork right downhill into the dip and climb up the other side. [5].* Beyond this, *pick up a car-wide grass path downhill*, your direction 130 degrees.

In 130 metres, *turn left on the broad path along the valley bottom*, slightly uphill, your direction 70 degrees. (If in doubt here, take any route down into Plague Pits Valley, and turn left along the bottom of it).

*Stay on this path along the valley bottom, ignoring all ways off.* In 280 metres, the path becomes an earth and stone track and starts to climb a bit more steeply into a wood. In 100 metres *you come to a gate, and cross the M3 motorway* (in its famous cutting across **Twyford Down**, the cause of the protestors' fuss) on a bridge.

*At the far end of the bridge, where the tarmac road bends left downhill, go right through a wooden gate.* Beyond it, veer left with the path, climbing uphill with a line of scrub to your left. In 100 metres, cross a stile to the left of a wooden fieldgate. Here look back for a fine view of St Catherine's Hill and the Cathedral beyond and to its right.

Beyond the gate, keep straight on, with a wire fence to your left initially, and later to your right also. *Keep on this clear path between fields.* This is part of the ancient **Pilgrims Way** to Canterbury, and also to Portsmouth and from there to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Keep climbing gently, with a golf course now to your right. In 600 metres, the path starts to descend. In another 300 metres, *at the bottom of the dip, you come to a crosspaths, where you turn right onto a car-wide track*, your direction 250 degrees.

This curves left and right, and after a while starts to climb gently. In 300 metres the golf course is once again to your right, and the path levels out. In 450 metres, just past the last green of the golf course, you get a view of the valley to the right. Follow the car wide

track round to the left, your direction 220 degrees, ignoring a signposted footpath to the right in 30 metres.

Keep straight on, with occasional views through the hedge to the left. In 300 metres, the path narrows between two high scrub hedges, and in 100 metres more starts to descend. In 450 metres, *you come to a crosspaths with a wide gravel track, where you go right downhill*, your direction 240 degrees.

In 230 metres *you come to a main road, the A333*. [6] *Cross this with care*, as there is a blind bend to your left. On the far side, *ignore Church Lane forking left, and keep straight on down a car-wide gravel track* following a footpath sign, your direction 250 degrees.

In 70 metres, at the bottom of the hill, pass over a mill race with a converted mill to your left, and keep on down the car wide track under trees. In 100 metres, where the track ends, go straight ahead across a stile to the left of a metal fieldgate, ignoring a fieldgate to the right, your direction still 250 degrees.

Keep on along the left hand edge of the field on a car-wide grassy path. You are now back in the Itchen **watermeadows**. In 200 metres, cross a wooden bridge, and 10 metres beyond this, ignore a fork to the right, to keep straight on. In 40 metres cross some duckboards for 40 metres, and 20 metres beyond this ignore a path to the left and go across a footbridge and through a kissing gate.

Beyond this, *keep straight on for 20 metres until you come to the bank of the River Itchen*. Turn left along the river bank, your direction 240 degrees, ignoring a metal-railed concrete bridge ahead.

Stay on the river bank path and *in 610 metres you come to a road, where you go right*. In 30 metres on the right, you come to **The Bridge**, the lunchtime pub. [7]

*Coming out of the Bridge, turn right and pass under the railway bridge*. On the left just beyond the bridge is the entrance to **Shawford station** for those that want to cut short the walk.

Otherwise, keep on uphill on the road, keeping to its right-hand side. In 80 metres, you pass the car park of Shawford Down to your left. In another 120 metres, ignore a signposted footpath to the left, and in another 40 metres ignore two roads the right, and curve left with the road you are on towards the noise of the M3 motorway. In 70 metres more, *you come T-junction with a busy road, beyond which is the motorway*.

Cross this busy road with care, so that you are now overlooking the motorway below. **To catch a bus back to Winchester**, turn left here to the bus stop 60 metres away. *To continue the walk, turn right, crossing the motorway on a bridge*. There is a clear view of the infamous Twyford Down cutting to your right.

*At the end of the bridge, go left down Hurdle Way*, and curve left with the road. [!] *In 90 metres, turn right across a an easily missed stile*: it is at the far end of a concrete turn-off to the side of the road, but somewhat hidden behind bushes.

(If you can't find this stile, it is not the end of the world, as the walk rejoins the road two paragraphs further down: but the way indicated is much nicer).

Having crossed the stile, cross another (somewhat dilapidated at present) almost immediately and *keep on along a path under trees*, your direction 280 degrees. In 30 metres (earlier in

winter), fields can be seen through the trees to the left and right. In 100 metres you cross another stile, and beyond this the path descends and curves right. In 30 metres, you come to a junction with a car wide track.

**[!]** Here turn **sharp left** up some steps with a wooden hand rail, your direction south. In 20 metres, at the top, keep straight on up a steep grassy slope. In 90 metres, pass through a gap in the hedge, and turn right onto a road, your direction 290 degrees. There is a lovely view from here of St Catherine's Hill on a bearing of 40 degrees, and you can also just see Winchester Cathedral in a gap in the hills on a bearing of 20 degrees, to the left of a long curving line of trees on the hill opposite.

These views improve as you carry on along the road (Hurdle Way again), ignoring all ways off. In 650 metres, it becomes a gravel track.

In 100 metres more, pass a metal fieldgate and ignore a signposted bridleway to the left. Instead keep straight on along the gravel track, with a wire fence and fine views to your right.

In another 750 metres, fork right off the track onto a path that descends slightly downhill, still with the wire fence to your right, your direction 10 degrees. The path gradually curves right. In 120 metres, a footpath merges with it from the left, and in 200 metres more another. Keep straight, with the wire fence still to your right.

In 250 metres, there are some thorn trees right and left of the path. 90 metres further on, at T-junction, fork right, downhill, with a fence to your left and following a line of mini-pylons, your direction 70 degrees.

In 70 metres the path starts to climb again between barbed wire fences. In 300 metres, at the top of the hill, at a track junction, turn left, slightly uphill.

You soon pass into a tunnel of trees and scrub. In 130 metres, just before the track descends to a busy road 80 metres away, fork left onto a higher side path. In 30 metres turn left with this path, parallel to the road (unseen when the foliage is out) to the right. In 30 metres, turn right across a metal-railed footbridge across the main road.

**[8]**

On the far side of the footbridge, keep straight on, ignoring a concrete path to the left. In 10 metres, at a T-junction, fork right onto a gravel path, your direction 70 degrees. In 30 metres at a sign for Whitshute Ridge, fork left, your direction 80 degrees.

In 40 metres you emerge onto open downland with a fine view of Winchester Cathedral ahead (and of a large housing estate to your left: this is **Oliver's Battery**: see **History**).

Keep on along this ridge, descending gently. In 50 metres a path merges from the right, and in 130 metres you pass a bench to the left. In 400 metres there is another bench on the left, beyond which a grass path crosses the one you are on diagonally. Turn right on this, through a gap in the tree boundary marked by two metal posts.

Beyond the posts, turn left downhill on a path between trees/scrub, your direction 50 degrees. In five metres ignore a fork to the right, and in another 100 metres, ignore paths left and right. In 300 metres, you come to a railway line, which you cross on a footbridge.

On the far side of the bridge, go right, downhill, on a residential road, your direction 140 degrees. There is yet

another fine view of St Catherine's Hill, which you were on this morning, ahead of you.

Keep on the residential road, ignoring all ways off, *all the way downhill to the main road, which you reach in 200 metres. Here cross the road and turn right. In 20 metres, just before the Bell Inn, turn left down a tarmac driveway.* In 120 metres you pass the entrance to the **Hospital and Church of St Cross** on your right: see **History**. There is also a **seasonal cafe** here which makes a rather charming tea stop on a sunny day.

Coming out of St Cross Hospital, turn right (or *keep straight on past the gatehouse if you are not stopping*), *cross a stream, and pass through a wooden kissing gate to the left of a wooden fieldgate.* Beyond this, keep straight on, with the high pebble wall of the hospital to the right. In 30 metres, *20 metres before the wall ends and just after a ditch to the left, fork left onto a grass path*, your direction 60 degrees **[9]**

In 80 metres cross a stream on concrete footbridge with metal rails, and in 10 metres pass through a wooden kissing gate. Beyond this, *keep straight ahead on a car-wide gravel path*, with a charming water channel to your left (again part of the ancient drainage system for the watermeadows), and at one point another fine view of St Catherine's Hill to your right. Ignore all ways off *for 400 metres until you come to a road.*

*Cross this road, and go right over a bridge over a stream, and then left through a derelict metal kissing gate to the left of wooden fieldgates. Keep on along this car-wide gravel path*, with a water channel to your left, and beyond it the playing fields of **Winchester College** (see **History**), whose buildings can also be seen ahead left.

In 130 metres, you can see a bend of the River Itchen proper to the right: note the difference in level between it and the water channel to your left. In 300 metres there is another bend of the Itchen right, and in another 150 metres you *pass through a gap between metal fences, to go right on a tarmac drive.*

In 70 metres, *when you come to a road, turn left*, following the sign to "Wolvesey Castle, College, Cathedral". In 90 metres, *go left with the road*, unless you want to visit the ruins of **Wolvesey Castle**, whose entrance is just to the right in the wall ahead, to the right of the entrance gate to **Wolvesey Palace**.

Having turned left, you are now in College Street, with the buildings of Winchester College to your left. Walk up the right hand side of the road for a better view of these, including the college chapel. In 70 metres go over a bridge over a side stream, and 20 metres further on, you pass the gatehouse to Winchester College on your left: access to visitors seems to be only by guided tour, but by standing in the gateway you can get a peep at one of the college's quadrangles.

Otherwise, keep on up College Street, noting some remaining parts of the City Wall to your right. In 90 metres also note the brown painted 8 College Street on your left, which is **the house where Jane Austen died** (see **History**): note that this is a private house, however, not open to the public.

In another 60 metres, *turn right through the Kingsgate*, one of Winchester's two surviving medieval gates.

(Before you do, however, you might also like to peak left at the very

picturesque Kingsgate Street, a street closely associated with Winchester College, and 15 metres down it, just before the **Wykeham Arms** (a very cosy pub, incidentally, and a possible tea stop), you might also like to turn right up Cannon Street and walk little way up it: this quaint street is much in demand for filming period dramas.)

Having passed through the Kingsgate, don't miss the opportunity to visit the chapel of St Swithun in Kingsgate over the top of it: the door is just to the left after you pass through the arch, but it is sometimes locked. Also note the high Cathedral Close walls ahead of you, which date to the medieval period.

*Beyond the Kingsgate, turn right, and in 25 metres pass through the 16th century **Priory Gate** into **Winchester Cathedral Close**. Note the half-timbered buildings of Cheyney Court from the same era to your left, and Pilgrim's School, the Cathedral choir school ahead. But your onward route is to turn immediately left after the gate onto a paved pathway to the left of the road.*

*In 60 metres, at the end of this, re-join the road, and veer half left to pass to the left of the cathedral Deanery, with its three 13th century pointed arches (the rest of the building is 17th century), ignoring a road to the left.*

*In 40 metres, you pass into a square, with the Cathedral on its far side. Keep up the left hand side of this. In 140 metres, when you come up to the cathedral, turn left under its buttresses. In 30 metres you emerge by the main West Front.*

The **Cathedral Rectory**, the recommended tea stop is ahead. But to continue the walk, *turn right along the West Front, and in 50 metres, 20 metres beyond the end of it, fork half*

*left up a path to the right of a plinth with a statue of a soldier on it (a war memorial: but don't confuse this with the larger war memorial directly in front of the West Front and by the refectory).*

You are now reversing your outward route from the station. In detail: in 100 metres *at the end of the Cathedral grounds, keep more or less straight ahead across The Square* (more tea options here: see information at the top of this document), *carrying on up the unnamed street leading off from its far side, which in 50 metres leads you under an arch to emerge in the High Street just to the left of the Buttercross.* (Tea options here too)

*Turn left uphill.* In 110 metres, you come to the end of the pedestrian area, and keep straight on uphill to the **Westgate**, clearly visibly up the hill. Ignore Tower Street to the right of the Westgate, and in 25 metres more, *beyond the offices of Hampshire County Council to the right, ignore the Sussex Street to the right. But immediately beyond this, veer right up Upper High Street, passing to the left of the monument to the plague victims in 30 metres.*

*In 100 metres, ignore the railway bridge to the left, but keep on along the tarmac walkway on the left hand side of the road (now Newburgh Street), which in 20 metres becomes separated from the road by some greenery, and brings you in 200 metres down to **Winchester** railway station. Pass under the underpass to get to the London-bound platform*

## Walk Options

### THE RIVER SHORT CUT

This short cut is a more direct route from St Catherine's Hill to Shawford,

and follows a beautiful stretch of the River Itchen and its watermeadows: but in its early stages it is very noisy due to the proximity of the M3.

*From point [4] go down the wooden steps. At the bottom, ignore a gate to the right, and instead veer left onto a path up the valley bottom. But in 8 metres, veer right off this up a minor path that climbs directly up the side of the valley (ie, directly away from St Catherine's Hill behind you).*

In 300 metres, *at the top of the hill*, pass a green information board facing the other way (look back here for a fine view of St Catherine's Hill and Winchester beyond) and *ignoring a gate 15 metres ahead, turn right on a possibly hard-to find footpath into the scrub.*

In 10 metres, this curves left and contours along the hill through a lightly wooded area (and towards the noise of the M3 motorway). In 90 metres, it merges with a path from the right. In a further 120 metres, you pass through a kissing gate and keep on, now descending slightly.

In 150 metres you pass through another gate, with a fine view of the horrid motorway and its insensitive route across the historic watermeadows now ahead of you. Carry on downhill on the path and in 120 you come to a T-junction with a car-wide tarmac path where you turn left.

(Incidentally, if you think this junction is noisy now, the exact spot where you are standing was once the junction between the main Winchester-Portsmouth road and the old Winchester by-pass: a traffic-lighted junction that was a notorious bottleneck).

*In 100 metres, at a T-junction, keep straight on. In 40 metres curve left*

*with the path to come to a busy slip road by the M3. Cross this road with care and turn right on the tarmac path on the far side.*

*In 30 metres fork left away from the road on a tarmac path downhill. In 50 metres, this brings you to the River Itchen, where you curve left with the path under the motorway bridge, with the river to your right. In 30 metres, the path becomes gravel.*

*You now stay on this path, with the river on your right, all the way to Shawford, a distance of around 2km (1.2 miles). You will know that you have got there because you come to a road, with **The Bridge** pub immediately to your right. You can then resume the main walk directions at point [7], or take a bus or train back from Shawford to Winchester*

## **THE TOURIST SHORT CUT**

This route takes you back from St Catherine's Hill to St Cross Hospital, to join the main route as it follows the watermeadows back into Winchester. It is very noisy in its early section, but with fine views.

*From point [4] go down the wooden steps. At the bottom, ignore a gate to the right, and instead veer left onto a path up the valley bottom. But in 8 metres, veer right off this up a minor path that climbs directly up the side of the valley (ie, directly away from St Catherine's Hill behind you).*

In 300 metres, *at the top of the hill*, pass a green information board facing the other way (look back here for a fine view of St Catherine's Hill and Winchester beyond) and *ignoring a gate 15 metres ahead, turn right on a possibly hard-to find footpath into the scrub.*

In 10 metres, this curves left and contours along the hill through a

lightly wooded area (and towards the noise of the M3 motorway). In 90 metres, it merges with a path from the right. In a further 120 metres, you pass through a kissing gate and keep on, now descending slightly.

In 150 metres you pass through another gate, with a fine view of the horrid motorway and its insensitive route across the historic watermeadows now ahead of you. Carry on downhill on the path and in 120 you come to a T-junction with a car-wide tarmac path.

*Ignore the tarmac path to the left, and go straight ahead down a tarmac lane* (amazingly this now single-track road was once the main Winchester to Portsmouth road: made redundant when the motorway opened in 1994, it is gradually grassing over).

In 80 metres, *pass to the left of a fieldgate*, and keep on down the road. In 300 metres, you *cross the broad River Itchen on a bridge*: there are fine views right and left along the river – idyllic but for the thundering motorway noise. In a further 120 metres, you *pass around a metal car-blocking barrier*, and 30 metres later *turn right up a tarmac drive to Mill House Farm*.

In 90 metres, ignore a tarmac drive to the right and a gate into the farmyard to the left, and instead *go straight ahead across a stile*, onto a path with a fence right and a ditch to the left.

In 20 metres, *cross another stile*, and keep on along a gravel path on the left hand edge of a field. In 300 metres, cross a stile to exit the field, and keep straight on along an avenue of trees with a ditch to your left.

You can now see **St Cross Church and Hospital** ahead to your left. In 100 metres *pass through a kissing gate and keep on along the left hand*

*edge of an open space, with the wall of St Cross now to your left.*

In 170 metres, *where the wall ends to the left* at a three-armed footpath sign, keep straight on along the path which curves slightly right. You can now resume the main walk directions after point [9].

## Appendix

### A SHORT TOUR OF WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Coming inside the entrance (which is usually through the door on the left hand side of the west front), turn right, and admire the enormously long nave, the longest Gothic nave in Europe, it is said (it looks even longer when seen side on from the distance. Walk up the nave a dozen metres, and turn back to face the **Great West Window**. This was destroyed by Oliver Cromwell's canons, but the glass was carefully collected by local people, and replaced when the monarchy was restored. As the original pictures could not be reconstructed, the shards were replaced at random, giving a curiously modern look. There is one panel which is nearly complete, however, which is four rows up and three columns in from the left. The West Window is the only remaining medieval glass in the cathedral.

Cross to the **south aisle** (on your right if facing up the nave). As you walk up this aisle, look carefully at the very far east end of the cathedral: you should be able to see that the arches and wall of this are leaning at a crazy angle. This was the result of the cathedral originally being built on marshy ground, allegedly on a beech raft of logs. In the late nineteenth century when marshland in the city was drained, the back of the cathedral began to list dangerously.

Between 1906 and 1911, a pioneering diver, William Walker, was employed to lay solid concrete foundations in the murky swamp water with his bare hands. The work was only just completed in time to save the south side of the cathedral from collapsing: today it leans foot for foot more than the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The cathedral crypt, underneath the choir, is still flooded in winter

About half way up the south aisle, there is the **chapel and tomb of Bishop William of Wykeham** (1366-1404) who founded Winchester College. Note that he was also Lord Privy Seal and twice Chancellor of England: Bishops of Winchester were important figures. Further up, one comes to the **chapel and tomb of Bishop Edington**, who was treasurer to Edward III and also Chancellor of England. (By now the leaning of the east end of the cathedral should be easy to see).

When you get to the **South Transept**, a total surprise awaits. Both transepts retain their original Norman architecture from the 11th century, with rounded Romanesque arches, and a decorated wooden roof. This part of the cathedral has a wonderful austere beauty, and gives you an idea of what the whole cathedral must have originally looked like. There is the entrance to the cathedral **library** to the right here. Note also the light hanging from the roof on an enormously long chain.

Climb the steps and carry on alongside the choir (actually properly this bit is the presbytery, but never mind), entering it by the doorway on the left. The **Great Screen** to your right dates from the 15th century, but the statuary is all Victorian: the originals were smashed in the Reformation.

Near the Great Screen, there is usually a slanted mirror, designed to help you

admire the decorated bosses on the roof. Look into it from the upper end, however, and it gives you an amazing upside down view of the whole length of the nave roof, showing just how long it is.

On the side walls of the choir to either side of the screen, you can see green chests which contain the **bones of the Saxon Kings** of Wessex and England (that is, the monarchs from before the Norman Conquest in 1066). The famous King Canute (who responded to the extravagant flattery of his courtiers by sitting in the sea as the tide came in, thus proving he was not all powerful) is over the door on the north side.

Also present are various Ethelwulfs and Egberts. But their bones are all mixed up: they were scattered by Cromwell's troops and when they were recovered it was impossible to tell whose bones were which. Each box therefore contains one head, one thigh bone, and so on: the only person whose bones can be clearly identified are those of Emma, Canute's queen, who is in the chest bearing his name.

The part of the cathedral is also where **Philip II of Spain** (he of Spanish Armada fame) **married Queen Mary**, daughter of Henry VIII on 25 July 1554 (The Beefeaters in the Tower of London say it took place there, but they are wrong. Winchester was in fact chosen because it was considered a safer venue for such a controversial match than turbulent London). In return for the expense of the wedding, Mary gave the city the **City Mill**, now a National Trust monument (**see History**). Mary's marriage to Philip proved childless and she was thus not able to restore England to the Catholic faith as she had hoped. She was instead succeeded by her half sister, Elizabeth 1, whose long reign finally confirmed England as a protestant country.

Walking down towards the carved wooden **choir stalls**, which date from the 14th century. Before you get to them, you pass an unmarked black marble tomb directly under the tower. Tradition has it that this is the **burial place of William Rufus**, one of the very few English monarchs not to be buried in Westminster Abbey. Rufus, the son of William the Conqueror, was killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest, which may have been an assassination made to look like an accident. There are even suggestions that he was killed because he was gay.

Tradition says Rufus was buried here in an unmarked grave as a sign of disgrace, and that the tower fell down on top of him, which is why Winchester does not have a spire. The tower certainly did fall down shortly after Rufus's death, but poor workmanship was as likely a cause as anything else. It seems Rufus's bones were then moved to one of the funerary chests containing the bones of the Saxon Kings, and, of course, are now all jumbled up with them. Bishop Henry de Blois, founder of St Cross Hospital, may have ended up in the black tomb instead.

Before you leave this section, investigate the choir stalls themselves, and the marvellous wooden supports under the tip-up seats in each stall. These supports were for monks to lean against while standing during long services: each is amusingly carved with different designs.

Return to the south aisle, and walk to the eastern end of the cathedral. Here you find the most wildly slanting part of the south wall, and a **statue of William Walker**, the diver who repaired the cathedral (see above). The decorated tiles underfoot here are originals from 13th century and form the largest area of decorated medieval floor tiles in a building in England.

Just behind you as you face the statue of William Walker, notice the tomb of **Cardinal Beaufort**, who was bishop 1404-1447. He was even grander than his predecessors being son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and thus brother to Henry IV. He also was present at the trial of **Joan of Arc**, and in atonement for this, there is a statue of her diagonally opposite, to the left of the Lady Chapel. It is a Catholic statue, note, as Joan is not a saint in the Anglican church.

The **Lady Chapel** itself is worth a look for its 16th century panels showing miracles performed by the Virgin Mary, many of which are rather amusingly drawn. The actual panels on show are copies; they can be unclipped to show the originals but you will get told off by the cathedral warders if they catch you.

Coming out of the Lady Chapel, the area ahead of you, and behind the Great Screen was once the **shrine of St Swithun**, a major place of pilgrimage in medieval times, but destroyed in the Reformation. Swithun was a bishop of Winchester in the 9th century, revered for his goodness. After he died, he asked to be buried in a simple tomb in the doorway of the Old Minster, as it was then, but due the popularity of his tomb with visitors, he was later moved inside the cathedral.

The day on which this happened – 15 July – is now St Swithun's Day. Tradition says that "If on St Swithun's Day thou dost rain/for forty days it shall remain" – supposedly a curse on those who moved St Swithun's tomb, though more likely a wry joke about the English summer. It is worth remembering the second half of the rhyme: "St Swithun's Day if thou be fair/for forty day's twill rain na' mair." The shrine – once a major place of pilgrimage – was destroyed in the

Reformation, but you can still see the blackened archway through which pilgrims squeezed to get close to the Saint's remains.

Return down the North side of the cathedral. In the **north transept** – another Norman part like the south transept, you can see on the left hand side in a tomb niche some remaining medieval painting, a reminder that even English cathedrals were once brightly painted. To the right in the transept is the entrance to the Crypt, which is open to the public in summer, but closed in winter due to flooding.

Carrying on down the north aisle of the nave. About half way down you come to what is allegedly the most visited place in the cathedral, but which for all that is hard to spot unless you keep your eyes peeled or see someone else looking at it, as it is not (at time of writing) fenced off or marked in any way. This is the tomb of **Jane Austen**, the novelist, a black stone slab in the floor, with a brass plaque (added in late Victorian times) on the wall beside it. The grave mentions nothing about her writing but instead talks (in an inscription composed by her favourite brother Henry), about "the benevolence of her heart, the sweetness of her temper and the extraordinary endowments of her mind".

### **THE REAL BATTLE OF TWYFORD DOWN**

The presence of the M3 motorway is something no one on this walk can fail to notice. Its insensitive route through Twyford Down, a hill behind St Catherine's Hill, and across the watermeadows on an embankment was a cause celebre in the 1990s when in what was dubbed "The Battle of Twyford Down" protestors chained themselves to bulldozers and made the national news. But in fact the story goes back much further, and the

current route could have been a lot worse. In many ways, bad though it is, the route of the M3 today is a victory for environmental campaigners.

The original plan, in the early 1970s, proposed three alternative routes: a westerly one, an easterly one, and one following the route of the Winchester by-pass, a dual carriageway that in those days ran right around the base of St Catherine's Hill on the town side. The dual carriageway had sharp bends and was mist-prone making it notorious for accidents. It also cut the hill off from easy access from the town.

Had the government chosen to widen the by-pass into the motorway, it might have succeeded, however. Instead, rejecting the better eastern or western alternatives, it proposed to build the motorway *between* the by-pass and the town, right along the historic watermeadows, and past the playing fields of Winchester College.

There was a massive outcry, and environmental protestors – now long forgotten – made national headlines by disrupting the public enquiry on the route and refusing to allow it to proceed, arguing that the enquiry was a farce and that the decision on the route had already been taken. There was major national debate about such tactics, but in the end they succeeded. The Department of Transport retired to lick its wounds.

The M3 to the north and south of Winchester continued to be built, however, ruling out the more westerly or easterly options.

The next proposal was for the motorway to go in **Plague Pits Valley** - the valley behind St Catherine's Hill, with the by-pass being removed from the town side of the hill. This proposal had reasonable support as a compromise among townspeople, but

environmental studies found rare flowers growing in this valley, and the plan was ditched.

It was at this point that the plan was changed to make a huge cutting through Twyford Down – then arable farmland – instead. Most local people supported this as the best compromise available: the M3 had by now been built to the north and south of Winchester anyway, and the traffic from it was being funnelled onto the by-pass, which had therefore become a horrendous bottleneck.

However, some campaigners bought Twyford Down and turned it into open space for the public (thus allowing a national newspaper to state erroneously that Twyford Down “had been a place of recreation for the people of Winchester for generations”). Environmental activists then moved in, trying to get the road tunnelled under the Down.

Despite fierce resistance the work proceeded, however. The protestors were not popular among local people, who regarded them as a thorough-going nuisance. Not knowing this helped cost the Conservative party what until then they had regarded as a safe seat. What happened was that the sitting Conservative MP died, and his replacement stated his opposition to having the M3 through Twyford Down. The Liberals won the seat, and hold it to this day.

As it is, the M3 through Twyford Down today really has little impact on the town: it is in a cutting deep enough to muffle sound. The clumsy way the road was built on an embankment across the Itchen valley and its watermeadows on the south side of the cutting was a terrible piece of vandalism, however, and causes much of the noise from the road that now drifts over Winchester.

The M3 saga had one happy postscript, however. In 1994, when the motorway past finally opened, the old by-pass was closed. For city residents who had grown up with this snarling dual-carriageway, to see it deserted was a miracle (the author cycled down it, winding from side to side in the middle of the road).

Even better, the by-pass was ripped up, and the places where it had cut into the side of St Catherine’s Hill re-landscaped and replanted with grass and trees, so it is now impossible to tell that the road was ever there. An entire dual carriageway has simply disappeared from the map – a rare miracle in this day and age. The place where it used to be is pointed out in the Walk Directions for you to marvel at.