

# The Wonderful River Wye



Discover High Wycombe's hidden wild and historic waterway



## A very special chalk stream

The Wye is a rare and special habitat, home to a rich mix of plants and animals. It's a chalk stream that rises in the rolling hills of the Chilterns near West Wycombe and flows for around 10 miles through High Wycombe, Loudwater and Wooburn before joining the mighty Thames at Bourne End.

Otter



Banded demoiselle

Water forget-me-not

Water crowfoot



## A rare habitat

Chalk streams and rivers are a globally rare habitat. There are only about 300 chalk streams in the world and most are in England. The Chilterns have nine chalk streams, including the Wye. They're home to some of our most threatened animals, including brown trout, water voles and otters.

## Teeming with life

Healthy chalk streams are famous for their exceptionally rich wildlife. Their cool, clear and clean water is full of nutrients and the lush vegetation that grows in and beside the streams makes them excellent habitats for many animals. Water crowfoot and starwort grow in the clean gravel of the riverbed, and the banks have stands of yellow-flowered flag iris and fragrant water mint in summer. These plants provide food and shelter to many small animals including water voles, dragonflies and the spectacular banded demoiselle damselfly. Minnows, sticklebacks and brown trout thrive in healthy chalk streams, attracting herons, little egrets and kingfishers to hunt along the Wye.



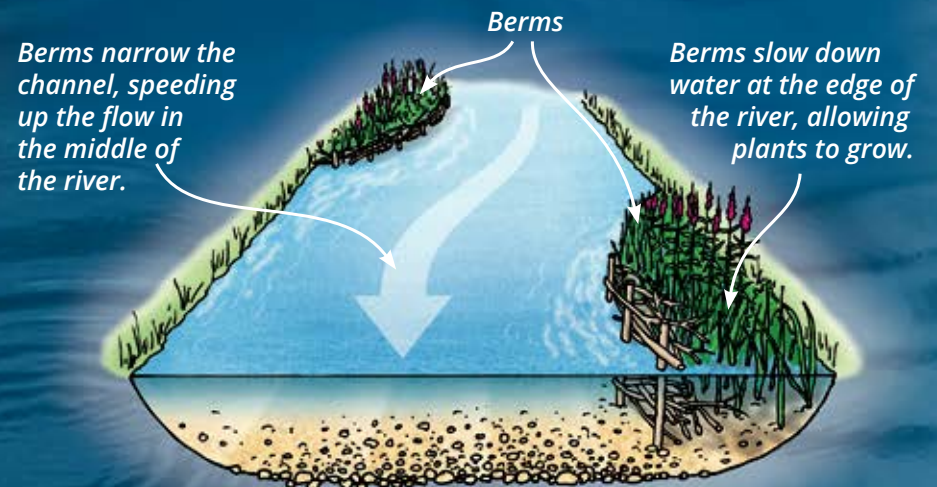
Brown trout

## Looking after the Wye

Many local communities and organisations help to look after the Wye. The Chiltern Chalk Streams Project, Revive the Wye and the Chiltern Rangers work with volunteers and community groups, clearing rubbish and helping to re-naturalise the river. Recent projects to restore the river and banks have been undertaken near the Swan Theatre and at Desborough Recreation Ground, Funges Meadow Nature Reserve and Wycombe Retail Park. The Jack Scruton Memorial Garden beside Buckinghamshire Council offices celebrates Jack's campaigns to restore the Wye and look after High Wycombe's heritage. Jack was the founding secretary of the High Wycombe Society, which works for the deculverting of the Wye.

## Practical conservation

Conservation work includes cutting back overhanging branches to let more light reach water plants, and installing small timber barriers, known as deflectors and berms. These narrow the river, vary the water flow and create areas for bankside vegetation to flourish. Fast-flowing water in the centre is full of oxygen, ideal for fish and river-flies, while slow-moving water at the edges drops silt on the riverbed, perfect for plants such as purple loosestrife, yellow flag and watercress.





## Be water-wise

The Chilterns is one of the driest parts of the UK. It also has one of the highest rates of water use per person in Europe. Water is taken from underground aquifers in the chalk hills and pumped to homes and businesses. Too much water is being extracted and much of it is wasted. We all need to be water-wise and save water.

### Tips to save water:

- Have a short shower not a bath.
- Turning off the tap when brushing your teeth. This saves 20 litres a day.
- Only run dishwashers and washing machines when they are fully loaded.
- Fixing leaks and dripping taps. This can save 100s of litres a day.
- Washing fruit and veg in a bowl rather than under a running tap. This can save 24 litres.
- Use a watering can in the garden rather than a hose.
- Use a water butt to collect rainwater for your garden.



## Harnessing the Wye

Over the centuries people have used water from the Wye in many ways; as a source of food and drink, to create attractive landscapes and as a source of power. In the 1730s Sir Francis Dashwood dammed the Wye to create a lake in the parkland in front of his Italian style mansion at West Wycombe. The Dyke, at the southern edge of the Rye is also a man-made water-feature, which includes a waterfall or cascade. It is thought to have been created by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the famous 18th century landscape designer, for Loakes Manor, which is now known as Wycombe Abbey.



## Grain, cloth and paper

The early Saxon and medieval mills on the Wye ground flour and processed cloth, but by the 1600s many mills were making paper and continued until the late 1900s, giving High Wycombe an international reputation for specialist paper-making.

## Industrial unrest

In the late 1820s some of Wycombe's paper-making mills invested in new Fourdrinier machines that produced large quantities of paper in a continuous roll. The hand-made paper workers rioted in 1830, smashing some of the Fourdrinier machines that threatened their livelihoods at several mills, including Snakeley Mill and Loudwater Mill. The authorities quelled the riots and several protestors were transported to Tasmania.

# Waterpower and its role in High Wycombe's growth

People have lived and worked beside the Wye for thousands of years, depending on it for a reliable water supply and as a vital source of power for industry. Watermills were built along the Wye from Saxon times, and twenty mills were recorded on the river in the Domesday Book of 1086. Over the centuries they helped High Wycombe become a prosperous market town.

## An industrial river

The earliest mills ground wheat and barley into flour for bread and animal feed. As the local economy grew, the machinery in some mills was converted to thicken or 'full' cloth and to make paper. By the 1700s there were dozens of paper mills along the Wye, making high quality paper including award-winning paper for bank notes. The mills gradually closed during the 1900s. The last papermill, Glory Mill at Wooburn Green, ceased working in 1999. Today Pann Mill is the last working watermill, partially restored by the High Wycombe Society in 2000 and open for demonstration days.

We want to celebrate the River Wye, its wildlife and its history. It's a very special chalk river with a fascinating heritage, from its source at West Wycombe, along its route through High Wycombe, Loudwater and Wooburn, to join the Thames at Bourne End.

Conservation organisations work alongside volunteers and local communities to look after the Wye, restoring the river so that everyone can enjoy its nature and heritage. Find out more at [www.revivethewye.org.uk](http://www.revivethewye.org.uk) and at [www.chilternrangers.co.uk](http://www.chilternrangers.co.uk)



CHILTERN  
CHALK STREAMS  
PROJECT



WILD TROUT TRUST



Green Recovery Challenge Fund





The location of the source varies depending on recent rainfall.

WEST WYCOMBE

1 WEST WYCOMBE PARK

Otters have been seen on the river near West Wycombe.

2 DESBOROUGH RECREATION GROUND

HIGH WYCOMBE

4

5

6

7

8

9

THE RYE

3

THE DYKE

BACK STREAM

THE RYE

10 KINGSMEAD RECREATION GROUND

LOUDWATER

11

The Back Stream joins the River Wye in Boundary Park.

⊗ Sites of watermills

WOORBURN GREEN

Bourne is an old word for a spring fed stream.

WOORBURN

12

WOORBURN PARK

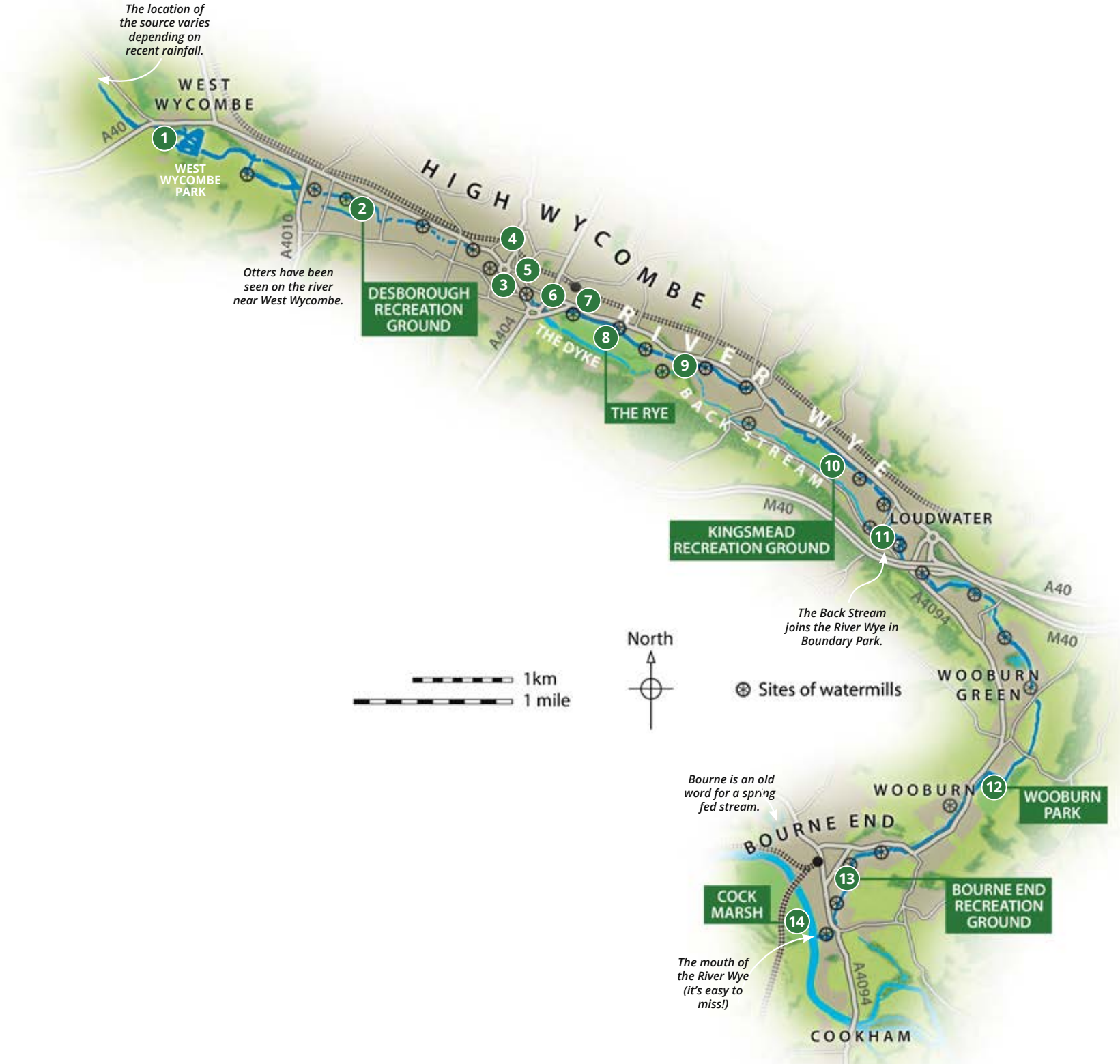
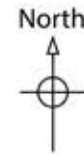
13 COCK MARSH

14 BOURNE END RECREATION GROUND

The mouth of the River Wye (it's easy to miss!)

COOKHAM

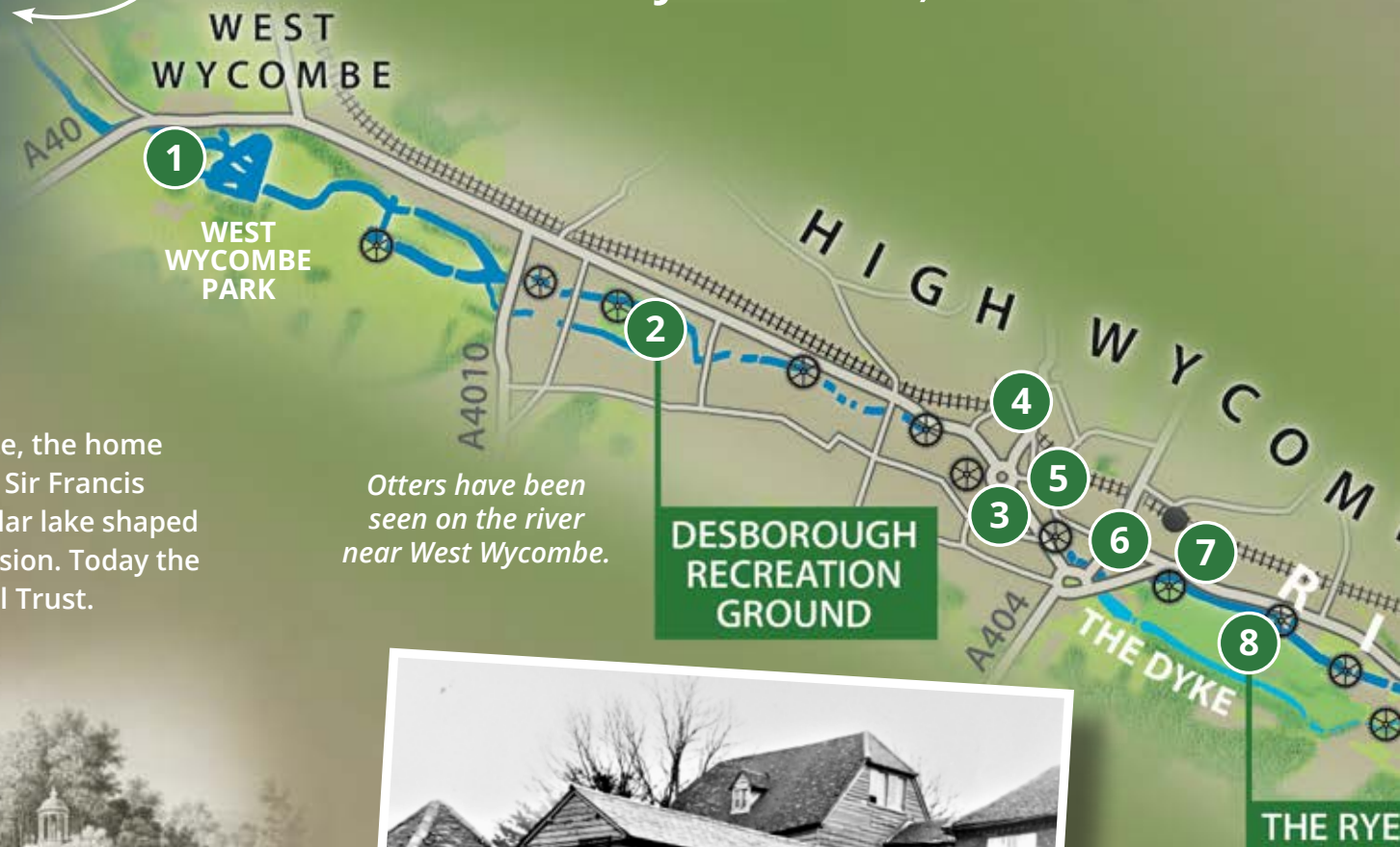
1km  
1 mile



The River Wye rises in the Chiltern Hills and flows from West Wycombe through High Wycombe, Loudwater and Wooburn to join the Thames at Bourne End. It's a short river, which flows for around 10 miles depending on the time of year and the amount of rainfall. This is a natural characteristic of chalk streams and the variable top sections are known as 'winterbournes' because they tend to flow mainly in winter. Today much of the Wye is a peaceful oasis teeming with wildlife. But for centuries it was a busy, industrial river, powering dozens of watermills that helped local communities develop thriving industries and a rich industrial heritage.

*'The stream made the mills,  
the mills the market,  
and the market made the town.'*  
John Parker, 1878

*The location of  
the source varies  
depending on  
recent rainfall.*



*Otters have been  
seen on the river  
near West Wycombe.*

## 1 West Wycombe Estate

The Wye rises as springs in West Wycombe Estate, the home of the Dashwood family since 1698. In the 1730s Sir Francis Dashwood dammed the Wye to create a spectacular lake shaped like a swan in front of his Italian style villa or mansion. Today the mansion and gardens are owned by the National Trust.



Bridge Mill c.1930



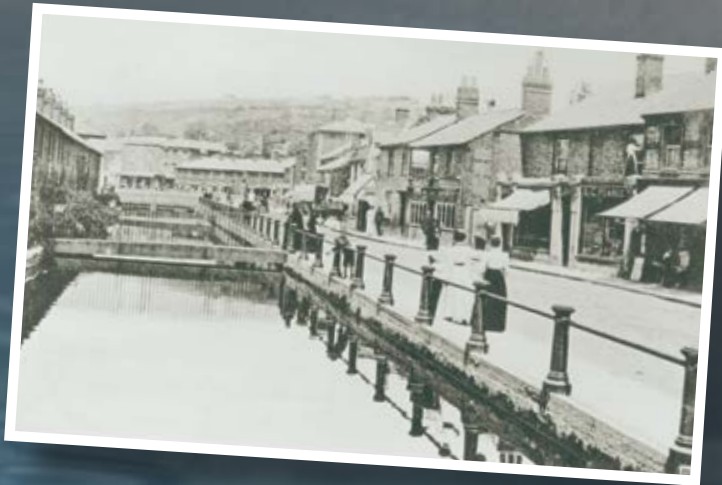
## 2 Desborough Recreation Ground

The Wye runs along one side of Desborough Recreation Ground and a tributary of the Wye runs along the other side. The banks have a rich array of aquatic plants which offer food and shelter for herons, kingfishers and other animals.

## 3 Culverted section

In the 1960s a section of the Wye was culverted and channelled into underground concrete tunnels as part of the town centre redevelopment. The High Wycombe Society and conservation organisations campaigned to restore the river and prevent any further culverting.

*The River Wye originally flowed along the edge of Oxford Road through the middle of town.*



## 4 Hughenden Stream

The Hughenden Stream is a tributary of the Wye and joins it in the culverted section in the town centre. Like the Wye, the Hughenden Stream rises in the chalk hills of the Chilterns and its length varies, depending on recent rainfall.

## 5 Bridge Mill

Bridge Mill was a landmark in the heart of the town from medieval times until 1930s when it was gutted by fire. It served as the town mill, located beside the bridge at the town end of St Mary's Street, a little upstream of where the Swan Theatre is today.

## 6 Jack Scruton Memorial Garden

Local teacher Jack Scruton was passionate about High Wycombe's history and wildlife. He set up the High Wycombe Society in 1968 and was its Honorary Secretary until 1988. The local council created the Jack Scruton Memorial Garden beside the Wye, celebrating Jack's work to conserve local heritage.

## 7 Pann Mill

Pann Mill is an historic mill on the Wye, rescued from demolition and partially restored to working order by the High Wycombe Society. It has a long history and was one of the mills recorded on the Wye in the Domesday Book of 1086.



## 8 The Rye

The Rye has a special place in local residents' hearts as a precious green haven for people and wildlife. Locals used to graze their cattle on the Rye. In the early 1900s the cows were often seen wandering back along the High Street on their own at milking time, turning off to their sheds as they reached them!



*Cattle returning from grazing on the Rye, c.1900.*

*Kings Mill c.1930*

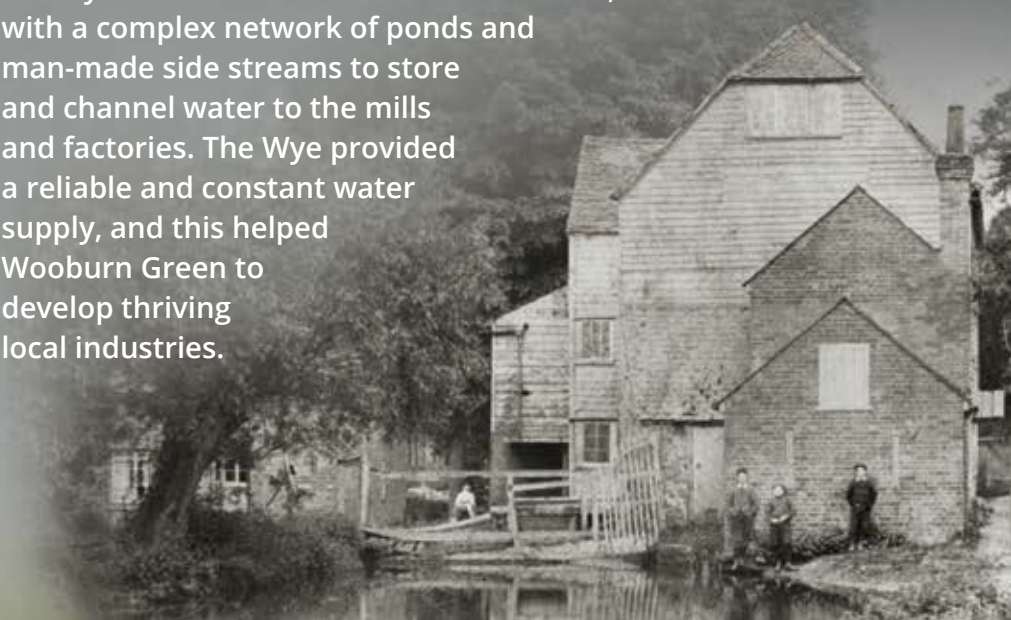


## 10 Kingsmead

Two chalk streams flow alongside the grassland at Kingsmead, the Wye on one side, and Marsh Brook, which is also known as Back Stream. There were paper mills on both streams in the past, using the water to drive machinery. The mineral-rich water also helped to bleach paper during its production.

## 11 Boundary Park

Historically there were several watermills along the Wye at Loudwater and Wooburn Green, with a complex network of ponds and man-made side streams to store and channel water to the mills and factories. The Wye provided a reliable and constant water supply, and this helped Wooburn Green to develop thriving local industries.



## 9 Funges Meadow and nearby watercress beds


Funges Meadow is a small nature reserve near the River Wye and Back Stream. There used to be watercress beds near here and local residents remember picking watercress on their way to schools in the 1950s.





## KINGSMEAD RECREATION GROUND

The Back Stream joins the River Wye in Boundary Park.

 Sites of watermills

Bourne is an old word for a spring fed stream.

## COCK MARSH

The mouth of the River Wye (it's easy to miss!)

COOKHAM

WOOBURN GREEN

WOOBURN PARK

BOURNE END RECREATION GROUND

North

 1km

 1 mile

## 12 Woburn Park

The Wye runs through Woburn Park with all the classic features of a chalk stream – fast-flowing clear water, a gravel bed and luxuriant bankside vegetation. You can often see brown trout swimming here, facing upstream, just waiting for tasty water insects and little fish to float past!



## 13 Bourne End

Brown trout live and breed in the Wye. It acts as a 'nursery' for the Thames, offering quiet stretches of water where young fish or 'fry' can grow until they are big and strong enough to swim in the larger river. Conservation organisations are gradually removing weirs along the Wye which currently stop fish from migrating freely along the entire river.

## 14 Cock Marsh

The Wye joins the Thames at Bourne End but the confluence is difficult to see, especially in summer as it is hidden by large trees on the bank. The best view is from the Thames Path on the National Trust's Cock Marsh on the south side of the Thames.