

The old course of the New River in Whitewebbs:

In Elizabeth 1st's reign London was growing and in desperate need of good water supplies. The Thames, the rivers of London such as the Fleet, and many of the city wells were polluted.

Just as the Romans had done 1500 years before engineers wanted to bring clean water to the people of the cities. In 1600 an engineer called Edmund Colthurst was granted permission to bring water from Hertfordshire to Sadlers Wells. He started the work but ran out of money. In 1609 Hugh Myddelton took over the project. He was the money man with good political contacts, including James 1st who provided half the money in return for half the profits.

The project was completed in 1613. Myddelton employed Colthurst to supervise the work and a mathematician, Edward Wright, as a consultant. Wright had specialised in navigation at sea and had sailed with a small fleet of privateers (licensed pirates raiding Spanish ships).

The river was an amazing piece of engineering. It followed the 100 foot contour of the Lee Valley with a total length of just over 60 Kms. The gradient was a drop of about 10cms every 1Km. The channel was 10 feet wide (3 metres) and 4 feet deep (120 cms). The measuring was done with basic wooden instruments and string—no laser levels, drones, and high quality maps. The banks were strengthened with timber and sealed with clay. Carpenters and labourers did the work by hand.

The system was enhanced in the 19th Century with pumping stations and by straightening out parts of the route, including the loop that goes through Whitewebbs.

Much of the original loop in the New River can be followed in Whitewebbs Park as can be seen from the map overleaf. The line runs from Myddelton House via the golf course to the Flash Lane aqueduct. It turns back to run along the line of the bridleway to Beggars Hollow and along the footpath to Gough's Park.

Most parts are easy to follow, others are overgrown. In winter there is usually water in long stretches, in summer it dries out. As the golf course is now closed we can follow the line of the New River right across it. Some bits are overgrown but they can be the most interesting.

Several of the older copses on the golf course are associated with the new River. These are havens for wild life and protectors of biodiversity. The recent beaver enclosure has made more of the Old Course accessible. Follow the southern fence of the enclosure.

Following the loop from Whitewebbs to Goughs Park and up to Myddelton House and then back along the northern sector of the loop makes for a good and rewarding walk. At Myddelton House you can discover the link between the Old Course of the New River and the Victoria Line.

See how many of these markers you can spot on your journey. NRC stands for New River Company

To find out more read London's New River by Robert Ward

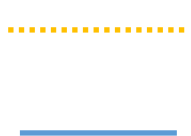
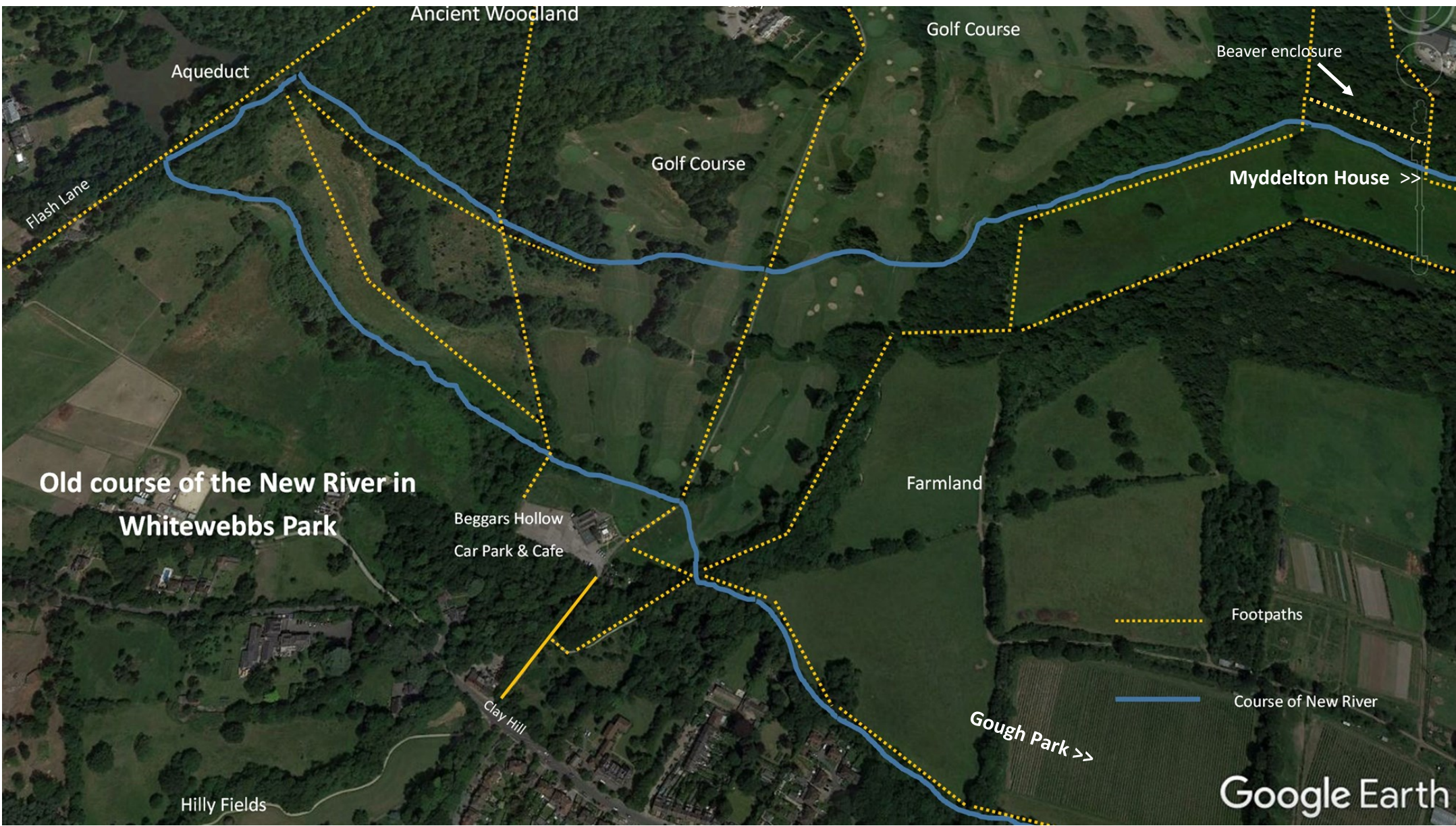


Exploring Whitewebbs Park

The old course of the New River

part of Enfield's industrial archaeology.





footpaths

Old course of New River

