

# A hidden river...

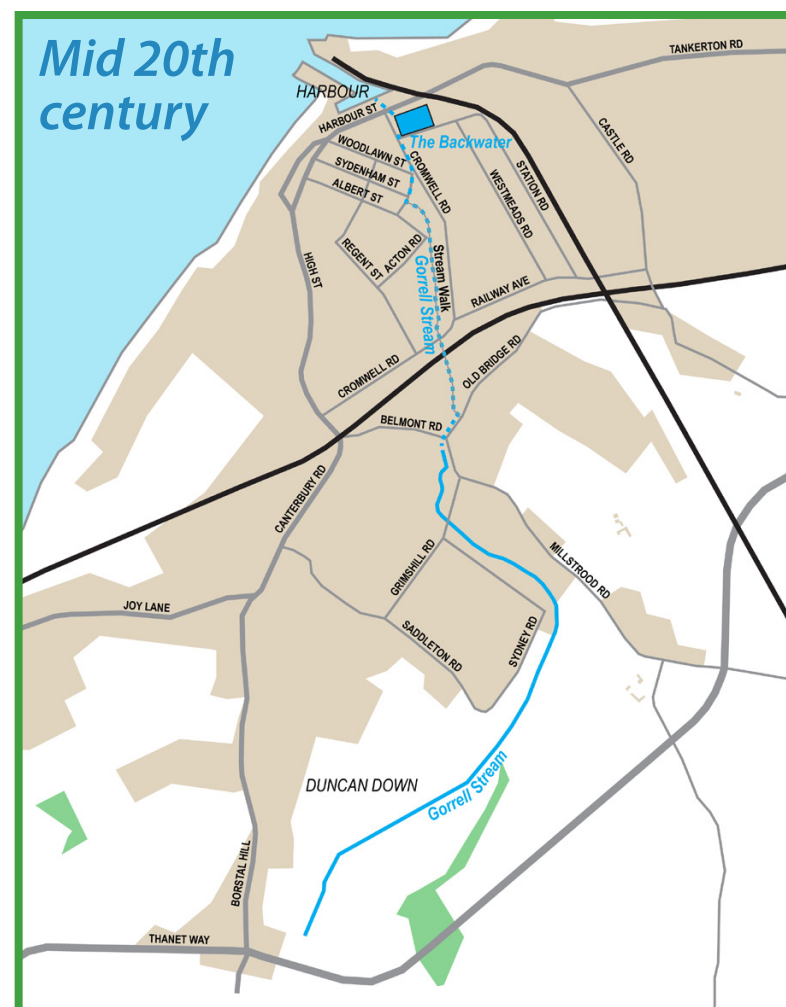
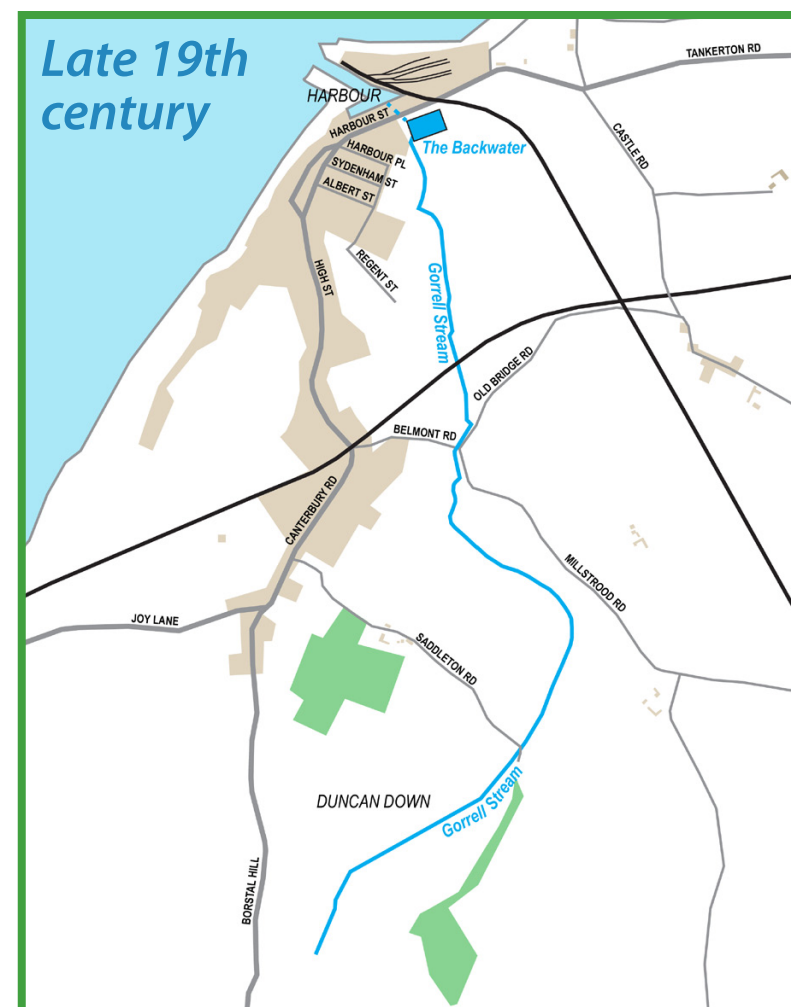
## The Gorrell Stream

Stream Walk is so-called because the Gorrell Stream once flowed under your feet.



This photo was taken in the 1920s, close to where you are standing. It shows the stream in the process of being enclosed in an underground culvert.

The maps below show how the Gorrell changed over time as Whitstable grew in the 19th and 20th centuries.



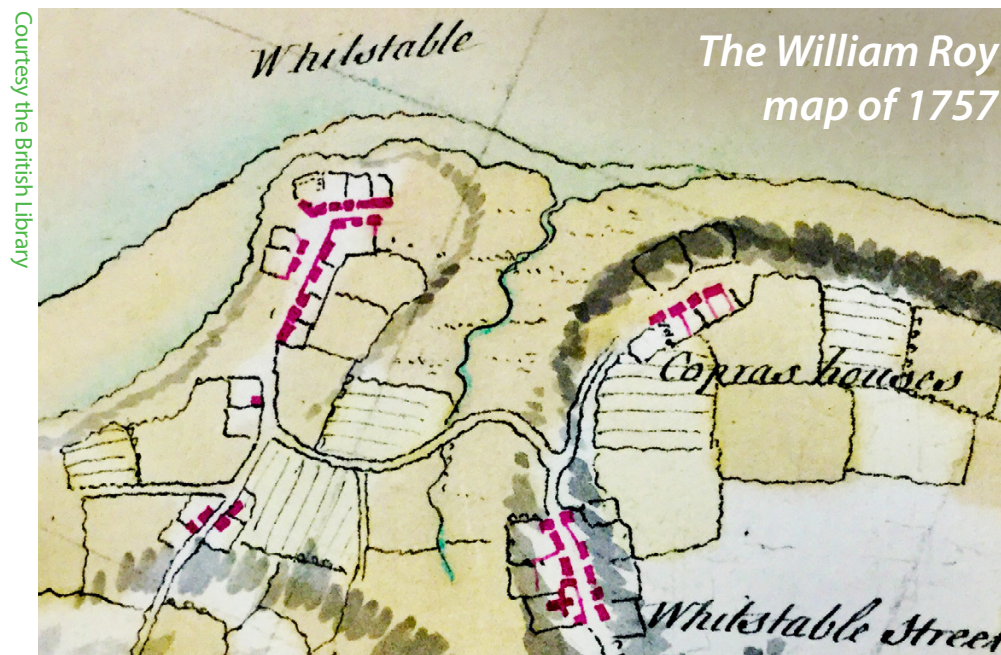
— Gorrell Stream (open)    ..... Gorrell Stream (underground)    ■ Built-up area    ■ Woodland    — Roads    — Railways

0 0.5 1 mile

Panel produced by Clarity Interpretation [www.clarityinterpretation.com](http://www.clarityinterpretation.com) 07827 797327

Today the Gorrell flows from its source near Duncan Down, on the outskirts of Whitstable, to the harbour. Over time its course has been considerably altered.

For most of its history, the stream meandered on a natural course, as shown on an early map dated 1757. It flowed into the sea to the east of the harbour – an area known as 'The Outlets'. It was tidal and surrounded by wetland habitats but may have been quite polluted: the same map also shows the presence of 'Copras houses' – an old industrial site producing a dye fixer known as copperas.



The first man-made change would probably have been the draining of the wetland bordering the Gorrell, known as White Marsh, for farmland. Maps from the late 18th century show the presence of flood banks and the river itself would have been straightened to control flooding.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Gorrell we see (or don't see!) today took shape. Whitstable Harbour, completed in the 1830s, was prone to silting. The solution was a reservoir next to the harbour, built in 1845, fed by the Gorrell Stream and by seawater at high tide. At low tide, the water in the reservoir was released into the harbour to flush out the silt.

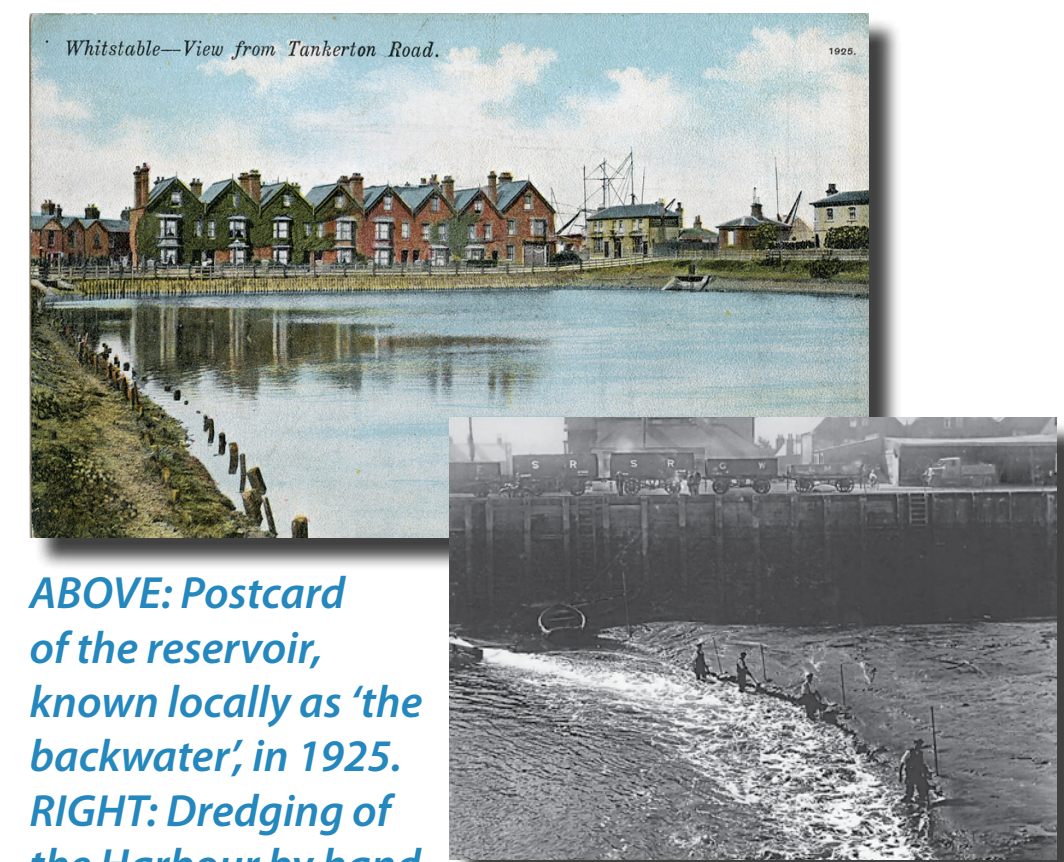
The Gorrell was still largely an open waterway at this time. It remained so until the early 20th century, when Whitstable grew significantly, expanding eastwards. In the 1920s a long stretch of the Gorrell was culverted under what became Stream Walk.



Meanwhile, a larger harbour reservoir had been constructed but still proved inefficient. Issues with odour and unsanitary water led to it being concreted over in the 1960s. The 'Gorrell Tank' is now under the large car park next to the harbour.

In a final twist, the Gorrell was re-routed again. Many locals think it still flows under Stream Walk; in fact it has been diverted, through a culvert parallel to Old Bridge Road then under Westmeads Road, before arriving at the Gorrell Tank (see 'present day' map). The culvert under Stream Walk now carries the romantically named 'Gorrell public surface water sewer'.

Today you can still see the Gorrell above ground at Duncan Down and along a short stretch near the cricket ground.



ABOVE: Postcard of the reservoir, known locally as 'the backwater', in 1925. RIGHT: Dredging of the Harbour by hand

We are grateful to Peter Banbury of Whitstable Museum, Mark Harrison of Timescapes Kent, Fiona Houghton and Roger Seijo for their help. All photos courtesy of Whitstable Museum.

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