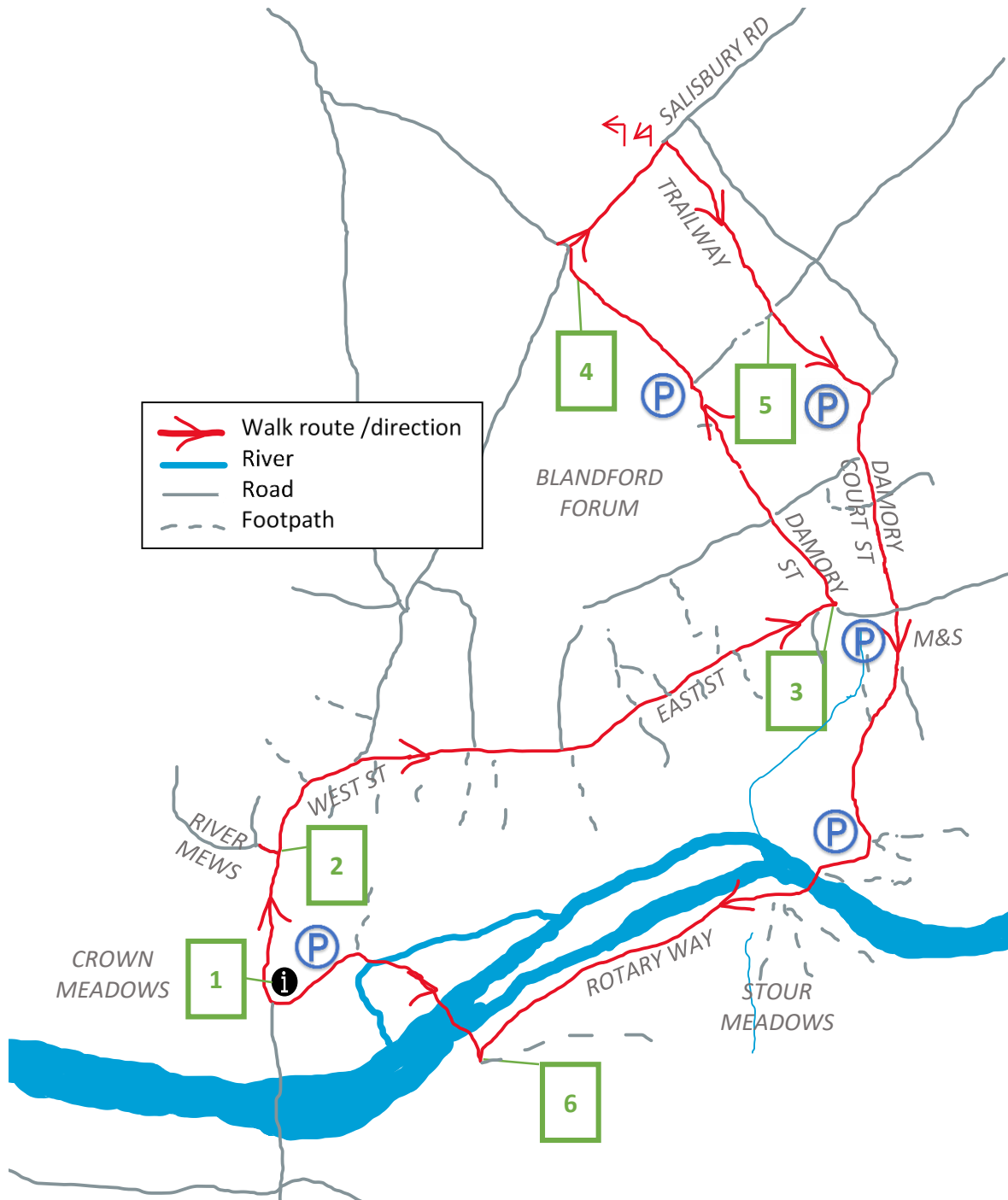


BLANDFORD STROLL 3



TOWN CENTRE



DURATION: 1.6 miles

TERRAIN: Suitable for all

1 Turn right out of the TIC **i**. After about 50 yards cross the road and look at the information panel situated at the entrance to River Mews.

During WW2 there was much concern that, should the Germans land on the south coast, there would be little to stop their rapid advance inland. Blandford's strategic position at the first significant crossing-point of the Stour ensured that it acquired fortifications designed to stop them, hence the large blocks of concrete on the left and in the Crown's car park. Indeed, there is a boundary-line around this side of town which still boasts two war-time bomb-shelters (often open during Dorset Architecture Weeks in September).



2 Cross back to the original side of the road and continue along West Street. Follow the pavement and as you pass through the Market Place and into East Street you are walking through the heart of the Georgian town.

Blandford has one of the most complete sets of Georgian buildings of any town in the country, all the result of the Great Fire in 1731. Aided by a westerly wind which caused the fire to jump the river and torch Blandford St. Mary as well, the town saw most of its largely wooden buildings go up in smoke. The damage was so extensive that the town had to be rebuilt, this time in brick and stone by order of Act of Parliament. As you walk through the town you will notice some blue plaques which recount particular historical details. The 18th century facades in the Market Place once fronted the townhouses of the Blandford bourgeoisie but gradually turned into shops. The work of designing the new Blandford was entrusted to the Bastard brothers, local architects trained by a disciple of Christopher Wren. Their mark is on all the buildings in this part of town, including the Parish Church, completed in 1739 and claimed by many to be the finest Georgian church outside London. The cupola fell into disrepair, but local determination and fund-raising has brought about its renovation and it is now safe to visit, as well as gleaming confidently in the sun when glimpsed from the Meadows. The Bastard Brothers used their office to show off the quality of the work they offered their clients, and you can still see this today if you go into the AGE UK shop and go up to the first floor where you can

admire their craftsmanship. There is a market here on Thursdays and Saturdays and a Craft Market in the Corn Exchange as well. The church may be visited during the day time and on the right, down one of the alleyways, is Blandford Museum. There is free entry for all; it is open from 10.00 - 16.30, Easter to October. Also notice in the Market Place the Drinking Fountain and the sign regarding Jack Counter VC.

3 After about 500 yards (Bakers Corner), you come to Damory Street on the left; cross the main road and walk up Damory Street.

*Further up the street, up a small flight of steps (opposite Alexandra Road) there is now a car park **P**. In the wall at the back are old gravestones as this was the old cemetery. One of them is the stone of Isidore Brine, an ex-slave, baptised into the Christian Church in 1822. Slightly further on you will see an archway; this was the entrance to the old Blandford Grammar School. Back in the 17th century Blandford was famed for the education it offered, John Aubrey describing this establishment in 1638 as "the most eminent school for the education of gentlemen in the West of England". Indeed, it seemed to specialise in clerics, producing many bishops including Dr William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury and Bruno Ryves who was chaplain to Charles 1.*

4 Just before the traffic lights, after the arch, (about 400 yards) change to the right-hand pavement and at the junction with Salisbury Road cross the road and head right up Salisbury Road for about 150 yards. At the end of the wall (just past the bus-stop) turn  left onto the Trailway, go down the slope then turn  sharp left to walk down the North Dorset Trailway.

You are now on the route of the old Somerset and Dorset Railway which went from Poole to Bath. The last train chuffed up these tracks in 1969 and the route has now been transformed into a leisure facility with a surface suitable for all – walkers, cyclists, horses, disability scooters and push-chairs. This Trailway runs north for about 9 miles to Sturminster Newton, via Shillingstone and south from the other side of town to Spetisbury for about 3 miles. There is an explanatory panel at the end of this stretch and you will see the

remaining buffers. You are also near the (now unknown) site of the Damory Oak, a huge and ancient oak tree whose girth was 68' and its diameter 12' when it was finally cut down. It had been hollow for a while by then and had latterly been used as an ale-house.

5 Passing under the old railway bridge, you are now in Station Court. Cross the car park **P** to find Damory Court Street. Turn right, down to the traffic lights, cross the road and walk through the double car park **P**, keeping to the left, following signs for the Trailway onto Langton Meadows. At the end, take the path to the right, down a short slope, across the Preetz Bridge (black) and turn right along the river.

As you arrive at the bridge you will see, to your left, the old railway arch, the only remaining piece of the railway in Blandford. This was where the Somerset and Dorset Railway (Poole-Bath) crossed the Stour. It was closed down in 1966 and the other arch(es) in the town where it crossed East Street were dynamited in the 1970's. Across the Meadows is the Hall and Woodhouse Brewery.

The river Stour has its source further north at Stourhead (NT) and completes its way to the sea at Christchurch. Here in Blandford the river is a very popular walk and there are regular sightings of kingfishers and our (non-nocturnal) otters. As environmental legislation has gradually improved the water quality of our rivers, otters are on most waterways, but the Stour was one of the earliest rivers in the south to welcome their return, their day-time habits here having gained them an early star billing on "Springwatch".

6 At the Mortain Bridge (blue) cross the river and the car park **P** and you are back at the TIC **i**.