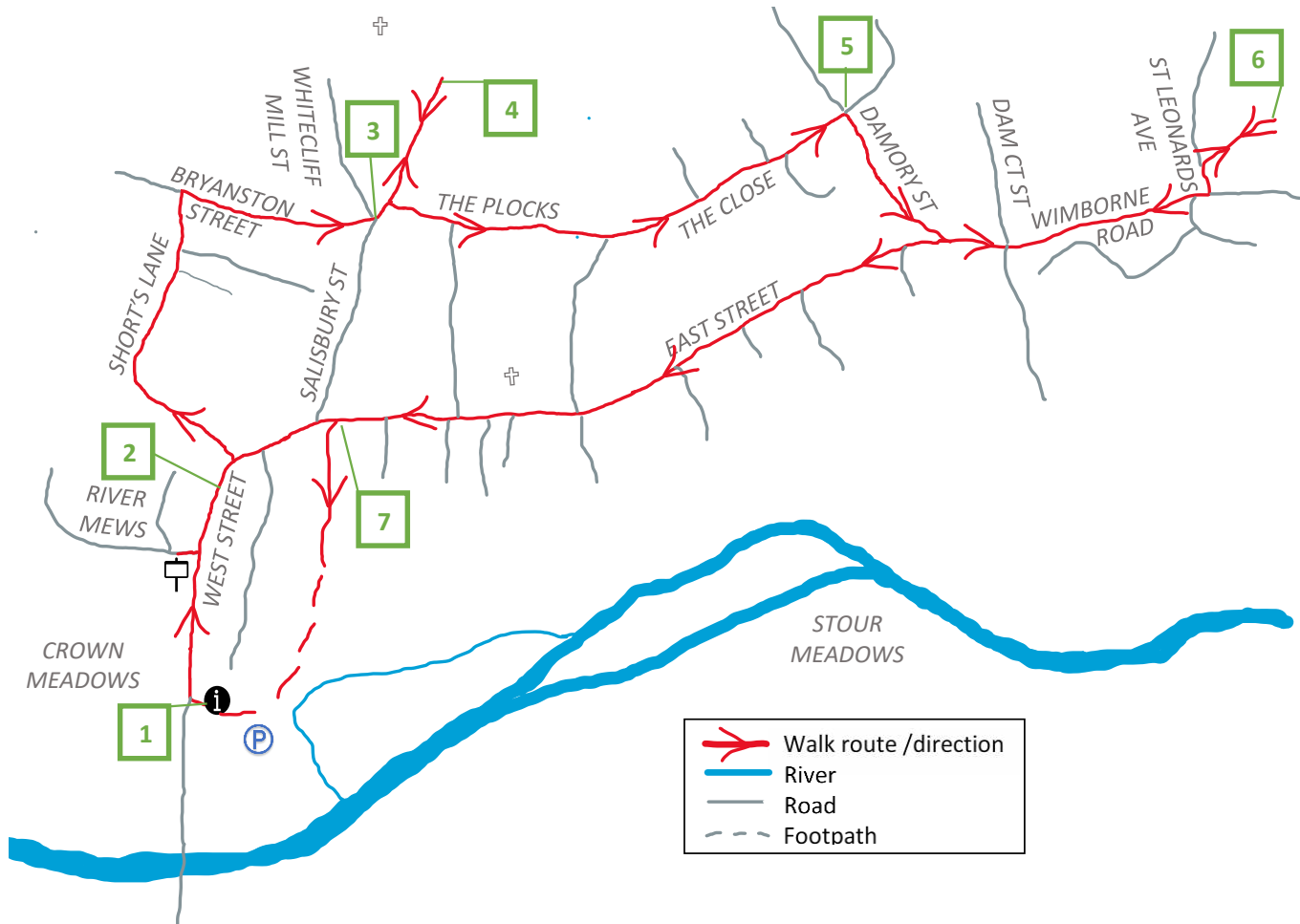


BLANDFORD STROLL 4





HISTORICAL TOWN



DURATION: 1¼ miles
TERRAIN: Suitable for all

With grateful thanks to Blandford Rotary for sponsoring the printing of these walk guides. Thanks also to the North Dorset Rangers, Blandford Civic Society, Dorset History Centre, Blandford Library, Lorna for her IT expertise, Pat for her photos, Liz (Town Guide) for her local knowledge, Adam for his technical support and all the guinea-pigs who tried them out and improved them.

1 Turn right out of the TIC . 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 to the left and in the Crown's car park. Indeed, the boundary-line around this side of town still boasts two war-time bomb-shelters.

2 Continue past the Crown Hotel. At the bus-stop next to "ijerrys", enter left into one of Blandford's little "snickets". As it widens out continue straight ahead past Old Garden Cottage on your right as far as the t-junction with Shorts Lane. Follow it up to the right into Bryanston Street, then turn right to the end of the street where you will find the King's Arms.

Shorts Lane in Georgian and Victorian times was the disreputable part of town, known as "blood and guts street" as it accommodated two abattoirs and associated industries, rendering its atmosphere unwholesome. As the respectable would not visit by night, it gave shelter to the Red Light district. Bryanston Street, however, was part of the Portman Estate, which in Victorian times built houses and cottages for its retainers and pensioners here. The King's Arms was built on the spot which was once a soap-boilers and the place where the Great Fire of Blandford broke out in 1731. Fanned by a strong wind and fed by the wood and thatch which characterised many towns at that period, it destroyed most buildings in Blandford. The Bastard Brothers, local architects, were commissioned to design and rebuild the town centre (in stone and brick by Act of Parliament) shaping the current Georgian town. The 18th century. was a period of much naval ship-building with quality wood scarce and expensive, so reclaimed wood from the burnt buildings was re-used for the roofing; there are still many Georgian dwellings whose roofs contain this wood. Owners of such dwellings say that to go up into their attics and breathe in deeply is to feel as if the Great Fire happened just yesterday, as the smell of smoke from the charred beams is still very

evident.

3 You are now on the corner of Whitecliff Mill Street. Cross it to Salisbury Street; cross it and go uphill (right-hand pavement) to the Ryves Alms Houses.

Ryves Alms Houses were built for ten elderly people of the town in 1682, one of the few buildings to escape the Fire (thanks to tiles rather than thatch). The Ryves family were wealthy local gentry, whose name remains on the later Reeveses paintboxes, with their greyhound logo, and can also be seen in the "Greyhound quarter" of Blandford. Opposite the Alms Houses is the United Reformed Church. This is "modern" but stands on the site of the original Dissenting Chapel in Blandford, established in 1662. It would have almost certainly heard sermons from the Reverend John Wesley (grandfather of the more famous brothers) who had had the living of Winterbourne Whitechurch but was sacked and thrown into prison for his dissenting habits.

4 Now re-trace your steps back down Salisbury Street turning left at the Forum Café into the Plocks (a place for keeping animals before market) and continue along the road, walking straight ahead and on into The Close.

At the top of Church Lane (to your right), are two of the finest examples of Georgian houses in Blandford. Lime Tree House on the right is now the home of the Museum of Costume (and teashop), originally the collection of a local enthusiast and now open to the public on Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (closed Dec to mid-Feb). Coupar House on the other side of the road, is now the base of the Blandford Royal British Legion.

Progress eastwards, past the Post Office and Woodhouse Gardens (this open-air Tabernacle area was where church services took place until the new church was built) to the Old House on your right. This is the oldest house in Blandford, surviving the Great Fire, and built in the first half of the 17th century for German Protestant refugees from the Thirty Years War. You pass Dorset Street, in which number 16 was the home of Jack Counter VC, a WW1 hero. An earlier inhabitant was Inspector Frederick Abberline (later buried in Bournemouth) who led the hunt for Jack the Ripper.



5 When you come to the end of the road, turn right

down Damory Street and you will soon find yourself in East Street. Turn left here (Wimborne Road), cross Damory Court Street and walk about 100 yards to St. Leonard's Avenue. Cross the road and next to the fire-station take the footpath to St. Leonard's Chapel, about 100 yards, on the right.

The signboard will tell you about this leper hospital from the Medieval period, becoming a hospital for the poor in Tudor times (Now HQ of N. Dorset Rangers).

6 Retrace your steps towards the town centre along East Street and through the Market Place.

As a result of the Great Fire, Blandford has one of the most complete sets of Georgian buildings in the country. Most of the largely wooden and thatch buildings went up in smoke aided by a westerly wind which also caused the fire to jump the river and torch Blandford St. Mary; the damage was so extensive that the town had to be rebuilt. The 18th C. facades in the Market Place once fronted the townhouses of the Blandford bourgeoisie but gradually turned into shops. The mark of the Bastard brothers is on all the buildings in this part of town, including the fountain and the Parish Church, claimed by many to be the finest Georgian church outside London, completed in 1739. 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. Opposite the Church, the Museum (free) is open every day from Easter to October and also offers Guided Walks in the summer. If you wish to see the Bastard Brothers' interior artistry, go into the AGE UK shop and go up the first stair-case to what was then their office and show-room where their clients could see the fine craftsmanship they had to offer.

7 When you get to Beaton's Tearooms, turn left through the arch into Greyhound Yard and walk back through to the car park  and TIC .

As you pass through the arch, look up to your left and see the plaque regarding Trafalgar Way. In 1805 this coaching inn, The Greyhound, was on the Dorchester-Salisbury turnpike, the 12th stage on the route from Falmouth to London.