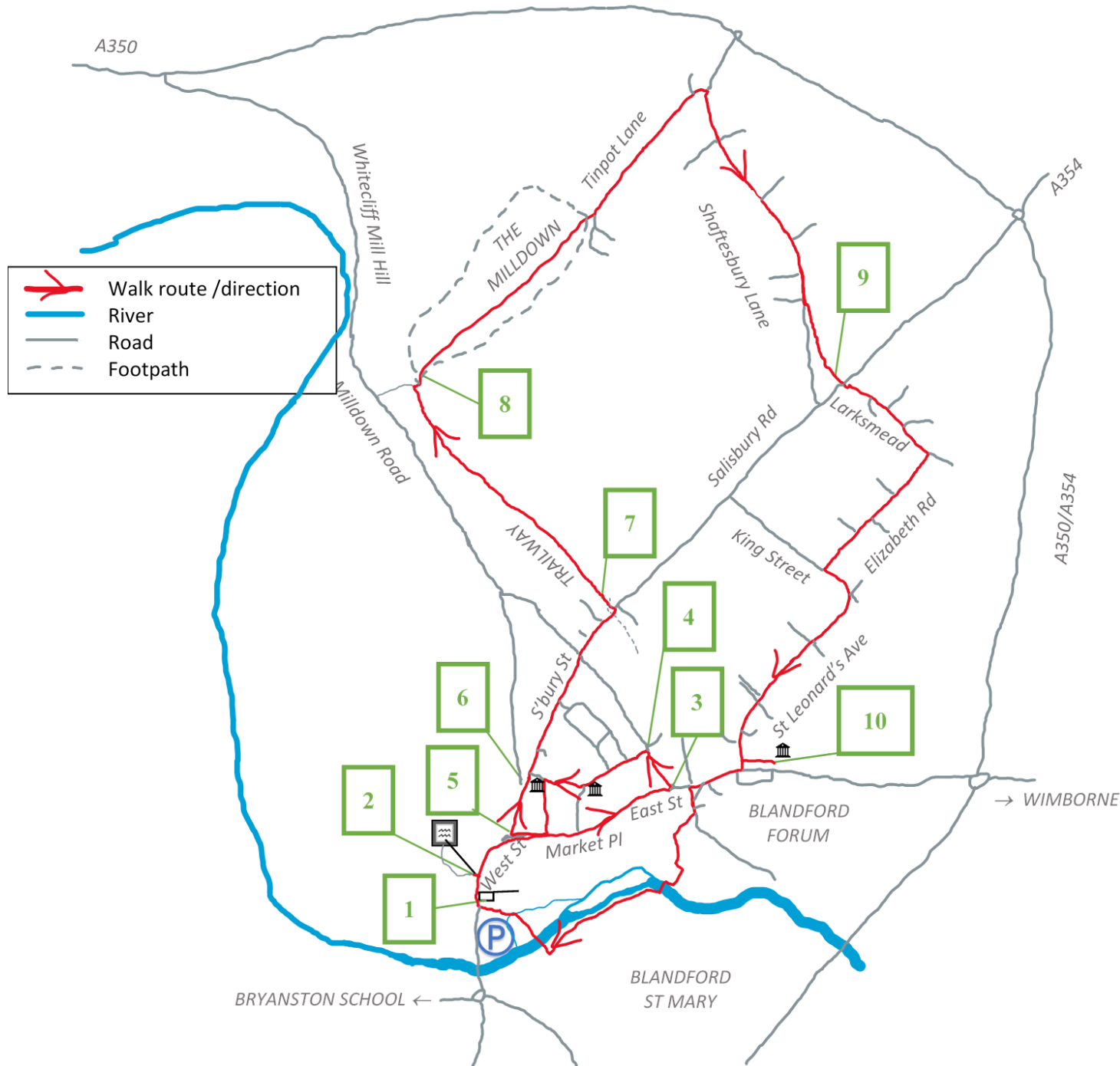



BLANDFORD WALK 2



MEDIEVAL LEPERS, AN 18TH CENTURY DISASTER AND TWO WORLD WARS



DURATION: 4³/₄ miles; time dependent on how many places you want to visit. Sites of interest which can be visited are marked  on the map.

TERRAIN: Suitable for all users

1 Leave the TIC ⓘ and turn right. 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 the enemy – hence the large blocks of concrete. Indeed there is a boundary-line around the 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. 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 set of Georgian buildings in the country, all the result of the Great Fire in 1731. As a westerly wind 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 here you will also notice some blue plaques which recount historical details. The 18th Century facades in the Market Place once fronted the townhouses of the Blandford bourgeoisie but gradually turned into shops. Designing the new Blandford was entrusted to the Bastard brothers, local architects, whose mark is on all the buildings in this part of town, including 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.

3 At the end of East Street, cross the road at traffic lights. Walk to left up Damory Street (opposite Damory Court), taking the first left-hand turn into The Close.

16 Dorset Street (to the right) was the home of Jack Counter VC, our local WW1 hero. The Close also sees the Old House, one of the few survivors of the Great Fire and built to an unusual design for a family of German Protestant refugees fleeing the Thirty Years War.

4 Continue along The Close, bear right past the PO, (Woodhouse Gardens ⓘ on your right: great for a quiet sit down or a picnic) into “The Plocks” (pre-market animal storage). Turn left at the Fashion Museum ⓘ, down Church Lane then right into the Market Place.

On the corner of Church Lane is a fine Georgian building, Lime Tree House, which houses the Blandford Fashion Museum, and Coupar House (opposite), the local HQ of the Royal British Legion since 1945.

5 From the Market Place, turn right into Salisbury Street and go up the hill, pausing for a moment where the road forks (after about 100 yards) and consider the King's Arms over to your left.

The King's Arms, in 1731, was a soap-boilers' establishment and was where the Great Fire started.

6 Taking the right fork, carry on up Salisbury Street, crossing to the left-hand pavement at the traffic lights. Cross Park Road and continue on up Salisbury Road. In about 100 yards, at the end of the wall and just past the bus-stop, turn left to go down the sloping path, then bear right to go up 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.

7 Carry on up the Trailway, ignoring all exits until a finger-post where the Trailway continues to the left but you take the right fork up to the Milldown.

The Milldown is one of Blandford's green lungs and is popular with dog-walkers, picnickers and bird-watchers. It was bought by the town as a result of the sale of the Portman Estate in 1927. As you look over to the left as you go up to the top, you can see the distinctive chimneys of Bryanston School over the river.

8 You can take either of the paths round the edge or walk up the mown pathway through the grass; you are aiming for the vehicle exit with a barred gate in the far right-hand corner of the Milldown. You are now on the edge of an industrial estate, but bear left up the

unusually-named Tinpot Lane. (4.1km) At the T-junction, turn right into Shaftesbury Lane to pass a supermarket and, crossing when safe, walk along the left-hand pavement for about 500 yards. Just after the pedestrian lights, turn into the Town Cemetery on your left. Walk to the right, near to the wall.

Blandford is not the obvious town for Commonwealth War Graves, but here they are (a signboard gives more information). The reason for them to be here is that there was a military hospital nearby and those who did not survive, both allies and enemies, were buried here.

9 Continue along the walkway between the very unusual Victorian Chapels (also open during Dorset Architectural Heritage Weeks). Leave the cemetery and cross the Salisbury Road into Larksmead opposite. Follow the road round to the right as it becomes Elizabeth Road and at the T-junction turn left into Kings Road which soon becomes St. Leonard's Avenue. Just before you arrive at the next main road turn left onto a footpath marked towards St Leonard's Chapel ⓘ which you will find on the right in about 100 yards.

The signboard here will tell you more, but basically, this was a leper hospital in the Medieval period, becoming a hospital for the poor in Tudor times.

10 Retrace your steps back along the footpath, cross St Leonard's Avenue and walk on towards the town centre Turn left to the traffic lights into Langton Road then almost immediately right, through the carpark beside the supermarket, following signs for the Trailway. Bear right, cross the Preetz Bridge (black), and along the river to re-enter the Ham carpark ⓘ over the Mortain Bridge (blue).

As you cross the black bridge you will see, to your left, the last vestiges in Blandford of the Somerset and Dorset Railway, as the tracks crossed the Stour, kept as a memorial to this now-defunct line. Along the river you may see egrets, herons and kingfishers and if you are lucky, a sight of the Blandford Otters. They are supposed to be nocturnal, but our family seems to be wilfully diurnal and were featured on “Springwatch” several years ago. If, on your walk here, you see a crowd gathering and bristling with binoculars and cameras, it will be for the otters who have made their home here!