

BLANDFORD WALK 3



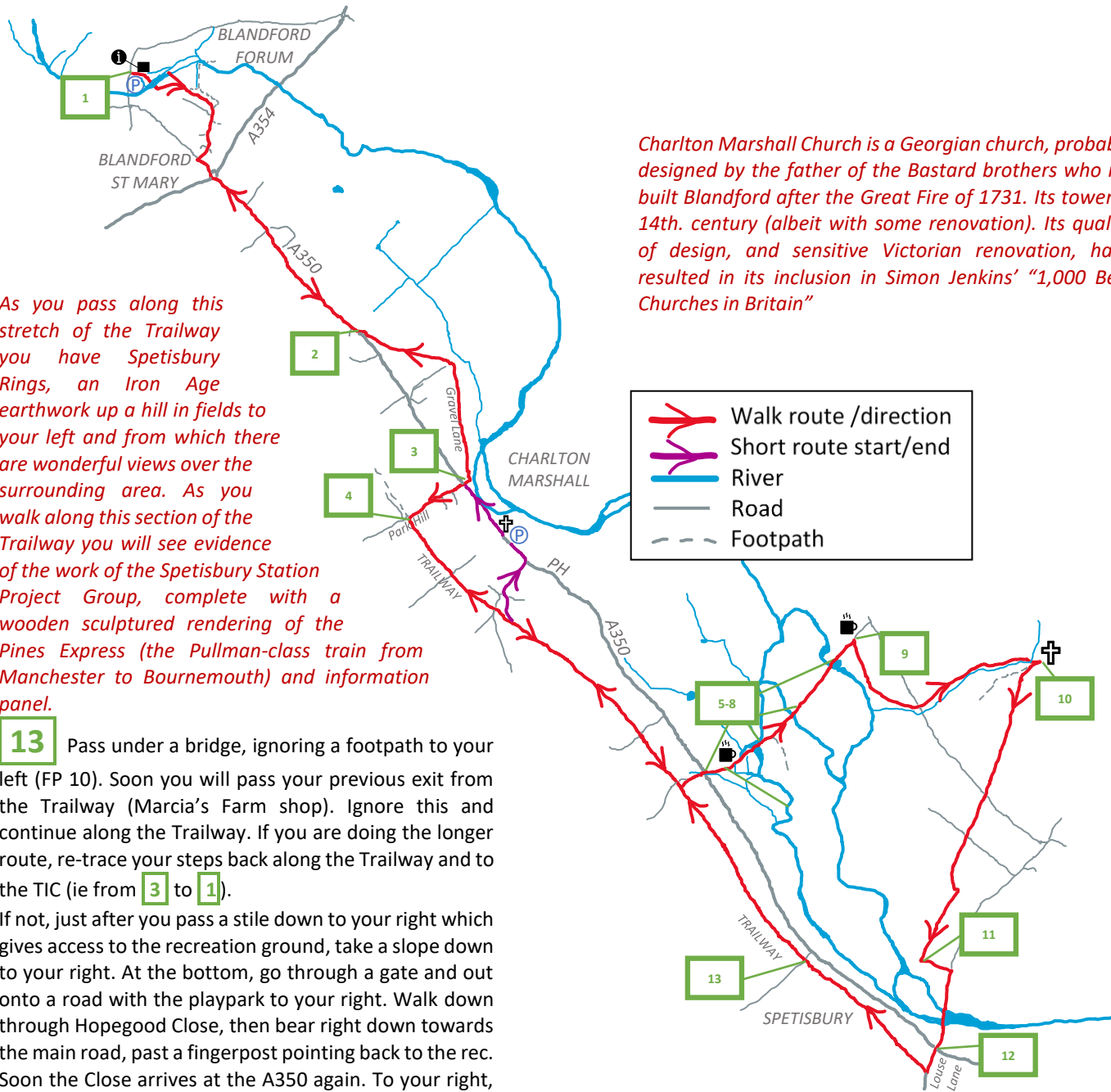
RELIGIOUS HOUSES AND THE PINES EXPRESS



DURATION: 9½ miles (or 5¾ miles if you park in the lay-by just after Charlton Marshall church, walk back towards Blandford and start from point 3). There is an hourly bus along the A350, (the X8) but please check times before leaving.

TERRAIN: Mainly easy going, suitable for dogs but probably not wheels. River meadows may be muddy during winter months, and there may be cattle. There are two cafés on the route and an inn – The Charlton Inn – and an excellent spot for a picnic behind Charlton Marshall Church.

OS Map: Explorer 118, Landranger 195



Charlton Marshall Church is a Georgian church, probably designed by the father of the Bastard brothers who re-built Blandford after the Great Fire of 1731. Its tower is 14th. century (albeit with some renovation). Its quality of design, and sensitive Victorian renovation, have resulted in its inclusion in Simon Jenkins' "1,000 Best Churches in Britain"

As you pass along this stretch of the Trailway you have Spetisbury Rings, an Iron Age earthwork up a hill in fields to your left and from which there are wonderful views over the surrounding area. As you walk along this section of the Trailway you will see evidence of the work of the Spetisbury Station Project Group, complete with a wooden sculptured rendering of the Pines Express (the Pullman-class train from Manchester to Bournemouth) and information panel.

13 Pass under a bridge, ignoring a footpath to your left (FP 10). Soon you will pass your previous exit from the Trailway (Marcia's Farm shop). Ignore this and continue along the Trailway. If you are doing the longer route, re-trace your steps back along the Trailway and to the TIC (ie from **3** to **1**).

If not, just after you pass a stile down to your right which gives access to the recreation ground, take a slope down to your right. At the bottom, go through a gate and out onto a road with the playpark to your right. Walk down through Hopegood Close, then bear right down towards the main road, past a fingerpost pointing back to the rec. Soon the Close arrives at the A350 again. To your right, is the Charlton Inn, but you turn left and retrace your steps back to your car .

1 From the TIC **i** cross the carpark then the river by the blue bridge. Follow the higher level path beside the carpark (free), past the skate-park and onto a road. Pass the Brewery on your right, cross a roundabout; carry on to a 2nd roundabout. Cross the road, turn left and cross the A354 (towards Dorchester) at a 3rd roundabout. Walk down the right-hand side of the A350 towards Poole for about a mile.

On the 3rd roundabout you will note not otters but badgers. These badgers, however, are often seasonally attired; depending on the time of year they may be sporting tennis rackets or wearing Santa Claus hats.

2 At Littleton Lodge on your right, re-cross the A350 and follow the footpath sign over a stile and into a field. Follow the footpath signs for the Stour Valley Way (SVW) over two more stiles and then along a grassy path which turns into a track and then a metalled road as it meets the cottages. This is Gravel Lane.

If you wish to visit the fine Georgian church here, turn left along the road for 200 yards. The tower is 15th century but most of it is Georgian, probably designed by Mr. Bastard Senior, whose sons laid out the new Blandford after the Great Fire of 1731. It also has a set of stocks. Re-trace your steps.

3 At the end of Gravel Lane, re-join the main road (A350). Cross over and go up the road opposite (Park Hill) which has a brown sign to Gorcombe Extreme Sports. After about 250 yards enter the Trailway on your left (away from Blandford).

You will see the platform of Charlton Marshall Halt beneath you, and there is an information panel telling you about the Somerset and Dorset Railway.

4 Follow the Trailway to the left, ignoring all exits for about 2km. Leave the Trailway on your left (when you see the church through the trees) and go down a gentle slope to a 5-bar gate. Turn right onto a road passing Spetisbury Primary School on your right.

The name Spetisbury comes from the old English word "speht" for woodpecker. It once housed St. Monica's Priory (1805) in the old Spetisbury House (a Georgian manor house built in 1735), but after passing through the hands of several other religious orders it was finally

sold in 1927 and gradually demolished. Only the old Priests' House remains as the current Village Hall.

5 When you arrive at the main road, cross it and follow the sign to the Old Mill/Keyneston Mill. There will be a stream on your right.

Through the trees to your right is Spetisbury Church. Marcia's Farm Shop offers refreshment opportunities with a café during opening hours (Wed-Sat).

6 Continue through the carpark, following the sign to the Old Mill. At the garages bear left, still following the footpath, which soon takes you over a narrow concrete and iron footbridge.

This house is the Old Mill, now a private house, and you can see the weir and the mill stream as you go along.

7 After the footbridge, the path jinks to the right and left; keep following the footpath signs till you come to an old wooden gate where you enter an open field, ignoring the footpath sign to your right.

These water meadows of the river Stour host an array of wild flowers in the spring but underfoot it can be marshy/boggy following wet weather. The meandering of the Stour plus earlier drainage works mean that the river divides into three here, which is why there are three bridges. As well as swans and ducks, you may well see brown trout in the water and sometimes canoeists!

8 Follow the footpath signs across the fields, crossing two wooden bridges with a set of boards between them over a particularly boggy area. After you cross the second bridge you arrive at Keyneston Mill.

Keyneston Mill dates from the early 19th century and has in its time been a watermill, a fruit farm, a vineyard and is now a perfumed botanic garden which has a bistro-café and runs events and courses.

9 At the end of the mill buildings turn right (opposite a green door) onto a path with some short wooden posts. You will pass through a swing gate and into a field with a hedge and trees to your right. At the end of this path, cross a road and enter a path which is marked as private, but the right of way gives access leading to Crawford Church, the old abbey buildings being away to your right. There is a stream to your right

which, being a winterbourne, may well be dry in the summer. Ignore the entrance to the farm on your right but continue along this track which is the SVW. After the track crosses the stream, go straight ahead and visit the church **+**.

The church of St. Mary the Virgin is a real little gem. Dating from the 12th century it predates the mighty Crawford Abbey, once the largest Cistercian Nunnery in the country. Its most illustrious inhabitants are Archbishop Poore, who presided over the building of Salisbury Cathedral in the early 13th century, and Queen Joan of Scotland, sister to Henry III. Its greatest claim to fame though are its medieval wall paintings depicting the martyrdom of St. Margaret of Antioch, a popular medieval saint.

10 On leaving the church take the footpath in front of you. Arriving at a barred gate, go through the smaller gate on your left, continuing along the SVW to climb gently up a grassy slope. At the top, pass through a gate, still following the footpath signs, into a field where the path follows telegraph poles. At the end of the field, you will emerge to cross a road and take the footpath downhill through another field with its boundary on your right. At the end of this field pass through a gate/gap in the fence and, crossing the road, continue along the path. The path jinks left and then right with the hedge on your right.

In the summer, martins and swallows can be seen swooping over the fields of cereals hunting insects.

11 At the end of this field the path takes a 90 degree turn to the left so that you walk along 2 sides of the same field. As you leave this field, turn right along a metalled road. Follow the road ahead of you over Crawford Bridge and onto the road.

As you cross this Grade 1-listed medieval packhorse bridge you may see swans, herons or egrets. On your left is the old Pumping Station.

12 At the junction, cross the main road, and walk up Louise Lane for about 50 yards until you see the sign for the Trailway on your right. Re-enter it, ignoring the footpath sign into the field (unless you wish to visit Spetisbury Rings). This is also CNC route 250.