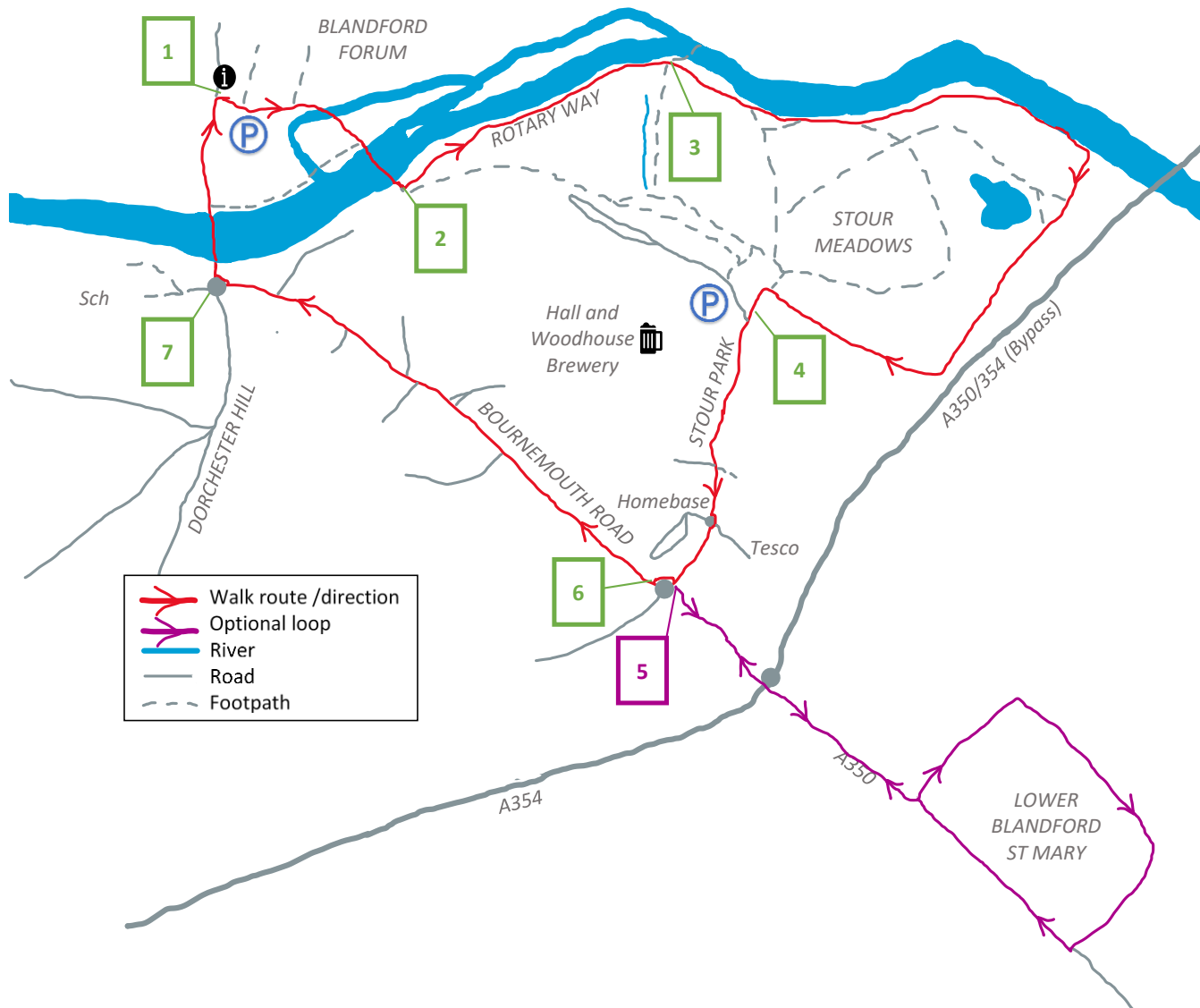


BLANDFORD STROLL 1



BREWERY



DURATION: 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles (2 $\frac{3}{4}$ with Lower Blandford St. Mary loop)

TERRAIN: Suitable for all users, including dogs and buggies.

PARKING: Walk starts at TIC **1** but Meadows Car Park **4** is free so could be starting point instead.

1 Leave the TIC ⓘ and cross the car park Ⓟ towards the river. Cross the Stour by the Mortain Bridge (blue).

In summer there are many species of bird to be glimpsed here. As well as kingfishers, there are coot, moorhens, gulls, herons and little egrets.

2 Take the left-hand path, along the river, as far as the Preetz Bridge (black).

The river Stour has its source further north at Stourhead (NT) and finishes 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".

As you arrive at the bridge you will see, on the opposite bank, the old railway arch, the only remaining piece of railway architecture 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. Much of the old railway now has a new life as the North Dorset Trailway which runs from Spetisbury (south) to Sturminster Newton (north) and is much used by walkers and cyclists. (Info available from TIC)

3 Do not cross the bridge but continue along the riverbank for a couple of hundred yards. When the river leaves you, continue to walk around the perimeter of the Meadows until you find yourself on a metalled path which leads into a car park with the children's play park and skate park in front of you.

Stour Meadows is one of Blandford's most popular leisure areas popular with families for picnics and dog-walkers (particularly in hot weather when the dogs like to take a dip). In winter there are dew-ponds here (where you may see wildfowl) but in summer they usually dry up.

4 Still keeping left, walk through this end of the car

park Ⓟ to the road up to a small roundabout. With Homebase on your right and Tesco's on your left continue to another roundabout on the main road.

5 (If you would like to visit Lower Blandford St. Mary, cross this road to the pavement and walk left. Cross the A354 at the Badger roundabout, continuing ahead on the A350 for about 100 yards, then take the sign to the left into Lower Blandford St. Mary. You can then walk the loop around the village, re-emerging onto the main road and re-tracing your steps to the Homebase/Tesco's roundabout.)

This is the oldest part of the village, the church dating from the 14th century, with later additions such as the north aisle added by Governor Pitt (grandfather of the 18th century Prime Minister Pitt the Elder) in 1711, where he established the Pitt family vault. Many of the houses in this quiet corner have a long history. As you walk the loop you will see the Old Rectory (which dates to at least 1732), Lower Farm House (dated back to the Tudor or early Jacobean period), Barn Farm Close (now three dwellings but a conversion of the old, possibly tythe barn, which stood on this site adjacent to the church) and the interestingly named Clerkenwell Farm House, where Tudor artefacts have been found. A farmhouse until the 1960's, it has a 3-storey addition from the Queen Anne period. The name betrays the earliest beginnings of the village when the land was given to the Nunnery of Clerkenwell in the 12th century. At the bottom of the U-shape stands the superb Manor house and gardens from the Jacobean period.

6 For the main route, turn and walk right.

You are now in Blandford St. Mary. As you pass the end of the Homebase building you will see, incorporated into the wall, the doorway of the old Blandford St. Mary school. This village, now incorporated into the larger town of Blandford Forum, is both old and new. During the Great Fire of Blandford in 1731, the wind was blowing so strongly that houses on this side of the river were also burnt to the ground, so the older part of the village near the road bridge and where the Stour Inn is situated are also part of the Georgian re-build. Just after the Model House, on the left, is a building which has retained the three storeys of delivery doors from

the original Hector's Brewery which burnt down in 1900, the business subsequently becoming Hall and Woodhouse with the new brewery built on the opposite side of the road. In fact, the village developed and grew because of the employment offered by the brewery. Following yet another fire in 2018, the 20th century brewery area is now being redeveloped for housing as a third one has been built. The shop is open at normal times and there is also the "Tap" which serves refreshments. Tours of the brewery are also available. Brook House, built for the local architect and carver Francis Cartwright is on your left, it and its neighbour being part of the Georgian rebuild. Just before you get to the end of the road, the Old Ford House on your right (a long-time Woodhouse family home) dates back to the early 18th century.

7 When you reach another small roundabout with the entrance to Bryanston School facing you, turn right, crossing the stone road bridge, then enter the car park Ⓟ and return to the TIC ⓘ.

A school since the 1920's, this was originally the entrance (built by James Wyatt in 1778) to the Portman Estate, owned by the family for the best part of 600 years, but sold up owing to death duties. (William Portman's claim to fame was the capture of the Duke of Monmouth during the latter's rebellion in 1685, and his sword hung over the fireplace in the old manor house.) There has been a bridge over the Stour here since Anglo-Saxon times. This site, where the Poole-Shaftesbury route meets the Dorchester-Salisbury route explains the founding of the town at the river crossing. The current six-span bridge is Georgian with later reinforcement. As you cross the bridge, be sure to notice the sign threatening you with transportation should you damage it! In front of you is The Crown Hotel, one of three great coaching inns of Blandford. The current building is not so old but there has been an inn on this site since the 15th century, when it was closer to the river and even had its own wharf. The Stour, weir-less until modern times, was navigable from Christchurch to Sturminster Newton and therefore very useful to Sir Richard Rogers for his smuggling activities (amongst was other accomplices, was Sir Walter Raleigh up at Sherborne whilst the Queen turned a blind eye).