

Biddestone Heritage Trail



The walk follows Public Rights of Ways (PRoW). It is a moderate walk, on footpaths and lanes with a couple of short, steep gradients and some rough terrain and some stiles to climb over. Suitable footwear is required, as there can be muddy footpaths through woodland, fields and alongside the By Brook.

The walk starts at the Biddestone Village Hall on Yatton Road, SN14 7BZ. There is a public car park to the rear of the Village Hall, please park thoughtfully. There is a bus stop by the Pond, The Green, Biddestone.

The walk is 6.6 miles long and has a total ascent of 616 feet.

Introduction

This circular walk seeks to explore the area between Biddestone and Slaughterford to the west and north to Ford and offers magnificent views of the villages, By Brook valley and flood meadows - all in the Cotswolds AONB. The trail visits many of the listed houses in Biddestone, St Nicholas' Church, the Butts before heading out across fields and down the hillside into Slaughterford.

Dropping down into Slaughterford, the trail passes through Chapps Mill (Slaughterford Mill), crosses the By Brook and then through the grounds of St Nicholas' Church before heading up over Common Hill into Ford with an opportunity for refreshments and a stop at the White Hart Inn.

Returning to Slaughterford the trail passes the Rag Mill and the follows footpaths, byways and quiet lanes back to Biddestone and the start.

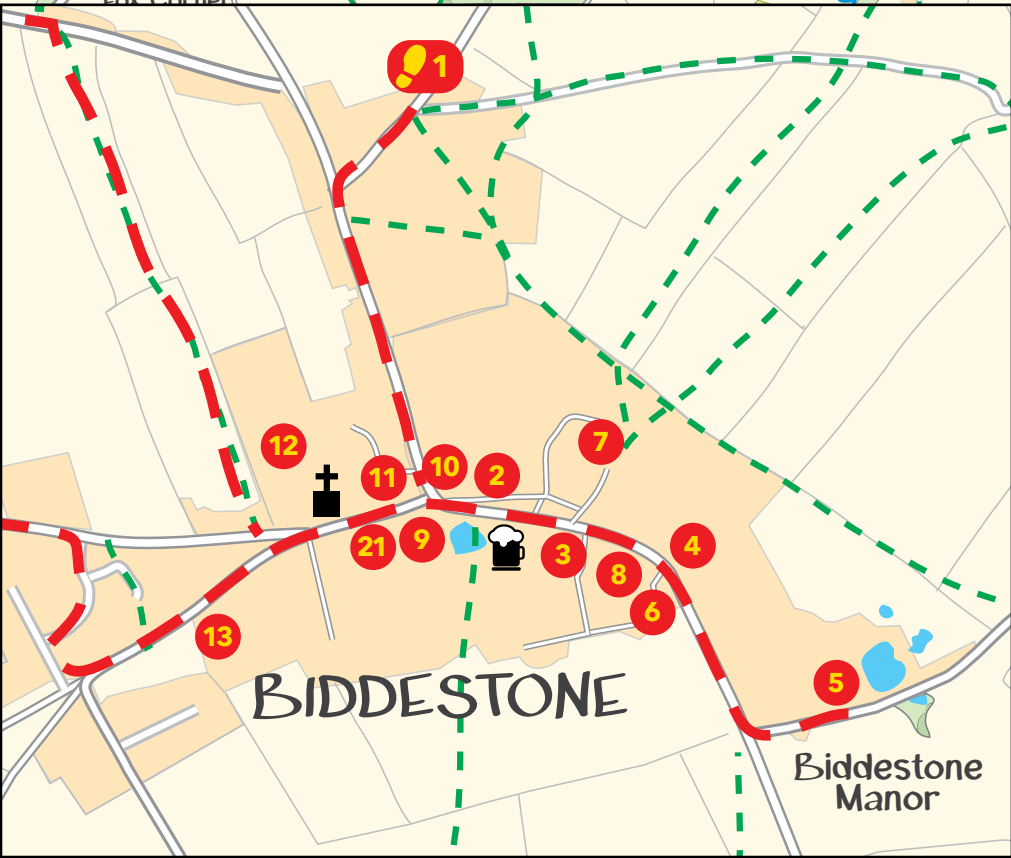


Follow and click the numbers on the map for info and directions



Start - Biddestone Village Hall 
Viewpoint 
Public footpaths 
For more detail see OS Explorer 156

Click the numbers for info and directions



1 Biddestone Village Hall

This building was opened in 2013 after local fund raising and National Lottery support. It is the base for several Biddestone sports clubs and many community events. Behind the tennis courts there is an ancient green lane that was once a major route to Chippenham via Lanhill where a long barrow from around 2,900 BC contained the remains of some of the area's earliest inhabitants.

► *From the front of the Sports Pavilion take the path on the left adjacent to the road to the ramp down into Cuttle Lane. Turn left and follow the lane towards the junction of Church Road and The Green. Cross over the road to outside a large house set back behind a stone wall called The Close.*

2 The Close

The Close was converted from three cottages in 1929. Although much altered in the 17th century it contains late mediaeval panelled stonework, so is a contender for the oldest domestic building in Biddestone. The separate building on the left was once a barn and then a billiard room. The garden behind the wall housed Attwood's agricultural machinery works until 1914. The 'Attwood Plough' was made here.

► *Continue past The Close to opposite the White Horse and Biddestone Pond.*



The Close

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3 The White Horse and Biddestone Pond

The 19th century hostelry, backed by a malthouse, was called the George Inne in the mid 17th century. John Aubrey mentioned that: "...the beere that is brewed of the well there is diuretique." A possible refreshment break for you on your return from Slaughterford.

The pond was created by William Mountjoy to improve his pasture grounds in about 1661. The spring that feeds it never goes dry and it is fed by a brook that flowed through the centre of The Green, called the Wavering. Probably enclosed in a sunken pipe in the 1740s the Wavering stream meets the Pudding Brook to the west of Chippenham to eventually enter the River Avon.

▶ *Follow the path to the War Memorial.*

4 War Memorial

The War Memorial was dedicated on the 22nd May 1920 and records the twelve Biddestonians who died in the Great War (1914-1918) and three in the Second World War (1939-1945). St. Nicholas' Church has a Roll of Honour that shows that 81 men from a total village population of 417 served in the First World War. Only Sergeant Walter Baston, died 19th May 1918, is buried in the churchyard extension off Bye Lane. The others lie in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and at sea.

▶ *Carefully following the road ahead out of the village, turn left into Chippenham Lane to view the entrance of Biddestone Manor.*



5 Biddestone Manor

The current complex of early 17th century house, barn, dovecote, priest's house and stables may have been one of two manors in the village. The barn has a date-stone of '1705' but other features of the house are earlier. Behind the wall on the right of the stable's wooden entrance gate is the site of the Saxon-founded St. Peter's Church demolished in 1846. It was the oldest known building in Biddestone with a record in the Domesday Book of 1086. A greenhouse uses the location now. The manor has extensive grounds with ponds and a brick gazebo on the Corsham Road.



Biddestone Manor

▶ *Retrace your steps back towards the village taking care along the road.*

6 Gable Cottage

Immediately on the left, at the entrance to The Green, is the 1723 dated building that was once the Reading Room in the early 20th century. Like many of the 18th century buildings in the village this was originally 'eyebrow' thatched. The name and three gables were added in the 1920s.

▶ *This vantage point opens up the picturesque vista of the 18th century cottages that surround the several grassed areas that form The Green.*



Gable Cottage

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7 Willow House

Most spectacular is the three-storey, 1730 dated, Willow House built for maltster Samuel Alborne and family. Unlike its rustic neighbours the building has a Georgian town house design. Now divided, it once included rear and side extensions from 1908 and 1982.

8 The Old Forge

Looking south again you can see a terrace of 18th century cottages with The Old Forge on the left and the White Horse on the right. The space adjacent to the oddly gabled Hawthorne Cottage, also with the 1720 dated Saw Mill Cottage, once contained Orchard & Co.'s sawmill until 1927. The lane beyond led to Corsham. The lower roofline marks the old cart shed and blacksmith's shop. Its double doors on the end are now a window. Right of the porch on the next house is a blocked passageway that once accessed a village well.

▶ *Following the path past The Green to the pond.*

9 Elm Cottage and School

Next to the pond is the pretty 17th century 'eyebrow' thatched cottage that once had an enormous elm tree in its front garden. This was felled in March 1976. Beyond is the converted tythe barn given by the church to found a National school in 1841. This became School Cottage when the actual school to the left was finished between 1844 and 1871. It closed as Biddestone Church of England Primary School in 1998.

▶ *Passing Elm Lodge on the left, and with a view of Elm Farmhouse and Home Place across the road (note the lancet window) you can see the gable wall of Turnpike Cottage with its blocked doorway.*



Willow House



Elm Cottage and School

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10 Turnpike Cottage

Turnpike Trusts, with trustees drawn from local landowners and other worthies, improved roads locally from 1725 onwards. A Turnpike keeper charged a standard fee from travellers to pay for upkeep and profit. Sheep and cattle drovers who over-nighted on The Green may have been particularly affected.

11 Wellhead and Village Pump

Carefully crossing Church Road another of the Poynder family's social improvements to Biddestone is visible as the 1870s stone-tiled wellhead and cast-iron pump. Mains water reached the village in 1955. The pump was capped when local teenagers flooded the street during their many assignations around the wellhead!

► *Walk along Church Road past the K6 red telephone box and turn right to visit St. Nicholas' Church.*



Turnpike Cottage



Wellhead and Village Pump

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12 St. Nicholas' Church

Originally of Norman origin only the south doorway, two lancets and the font survived the 13th to 19th century rebuilds. The 18th century interior is unspoilt and displays many memorials to local families; with several Mountjoys among them. A small gallery was built in 1712 to hold the congregation of St. Nicholas' Church in Slaughterford after it had been destroyed by Cromwell's men in 1649. Arguments between the parishioners meant the church had separate entrances for the two congregations.

- ▶ *Return and continuing past St. Nicholas' Church take the left fork where a huge Wellington Pine stands. Passing Mountjoy Farm on the left.*

13 The Butts

Mountjoy Farm opens out onto the village archery butts, probably derived from the Anglo-French word 'bouter' to expel, established by King Henry III's archery law of 1252. This ordered that English "...citizens, burgesses, free tenants, villeins and others from 15 to 60 years of age..." should be armed to aid in the defence of the realm. It is now a conservation area but once had a pond used to soak willow bundles for basket making.

- ▶ *When you reach a junction with the cemetery extension lychgate turn right into The Tynings, then Little Challows and left into Challows Lane.*

Follow Challows Lane, which becomes Ham Lane, for 890m until reaching the second footpath on the right. Go up the verge and cross the stile into the field. Go straight on diagonally across the field between the hedge line toward the corner of the field on the left. At the corner turn left and continue ahead to a stile in the fence line.

Cross the stile into the field and go ahead diagonally right on the footpath over the brow of the hill towards the far bottom of the field adjacent to Backpack Woods on the left.

Cross the stile in the fence line and follow the tree line on the left taking the path through the trees to emerge into a pasture sloping downhill.

There are magnificent views of Slaughterford village, St. Nicholas' Church, the Brewery, By Brook valley and out towards Colerne Down.

St. Nicholas' Church
Biddestone



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14 Slaughterford

The name Slaughterford is a compound of the old English slah-pom, meaning sloe thorn/bush and ford. Others suggest it may have meant 'Ford of Slates', from the limestone strata where the tiles or slates were made.

An old Roman settlement was situated on the site of Slaughterford, and it is reported to be the scene of King Alfred's victory over the Danes after their defeat at the Battle of Ethandun (possibly at the ford).

- ▶ *Continue downhill through the tree line to reach a stile with steps leading down to Germain's Lane. Turn left, continue along the lane passing two bungalows on the left and take the By Way through Slaughterford Mill on your right. Slaughterford Mill (Chapps Mill)*

15 Slaughterford Mill (Chapps Mill)

A fulling mill until 1790, when Charles Ward of Doncombe Mill took over from the Drewett family, clothiers of Colerne and Batheaston. Charles & Ward and partner William Duckett, converted the mill to paper in 1805. By 1818, the mill had been converted to cloth and the paper machinery was put up for sale. By 1827 the mill was back to paper making until it closed under W Dowding in 1994.

The By Brook approaching the mill is man made at a high level, and wider than the natural brook, to provide a reservoir of water. Today, a number of micro-industries occupy the site.

- ▶ *After passing through the mill site follow the By Way until reaching a track on the right back out to the Slaughterford to Thickwood lane. Turn right and go over the By Brook following the lane around to the left. Go past Brookside Cottage on your right onto the elevated footpath, passing an Edward VII post box set in the wall to the entrance of St. Nicholas's Church. Enter the church grounds via the metal gate.*



Slaughterford



Slaughterford Mill (Chapps Mill)

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16 St Nicholas' Church

St. Nicholas' Church was wrecked by Oliver Cromwell's troops and lay in ruins for 200 years. The Slaughterford church roof was supposedly removed for firewood and later the building itself was used for artillery practice. The church was rebuilt in 1823 in the early English style and restored in 1883.

- ▶ *Follow the footpath to the right of the church wall to reach the stile in the hedge line on the far side of the field. Cross the stile, down some steps to the lane opposite. Go up the lane through Common Hill Plantation to reach a T junction, turn left over a bridge to the White Hart at Ford. There is an opportunity here to take refreshment and use toilets if required.*



St Nicholas' Church, Slaughterford

17 The White Hart at Ford

Is a former coaching inn dating back to the 16th century. In the 1960s some of the scenes from the original Dr Doolittle film were shot there.

- ▶ *From the White Hart turn left onto the main Ford to Colerne road. Take care as there are no footpaths on this road which can be busy at times. Pass by the houses on the right to cross over the By Brook at the entrance to Duncombe Mill on your right.*



The White Hart at Ford

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18 Duncombe Mill

In 1704, the mill was probably a fulling mill and earlier could have been a corn mill. In 1778, with the local industry in decline, owner Benjamin Edwards built six new tenements still existing as the stable block, Doncombe Mill Cottage, adjoining the fulling and gig mill. In 1793, Charles Ward was the owner and soon the partnership of Cottle & Ward were making paper. In 1887 the mill became a corn mill. After many alterations the 18th century stone mill has been converted to an attractive dwelling.

- ▶ *Go through the kissing gate opposite Doncombe Mill to enter the field and follow the meandering By Brook on your left to cross a weir footbridge. If time permits sit on the bench next to the weir and sluice and relax enjoying the tranquillity of the flood meadow.*

19 By Brook

Is some 12 miles (19 km) long, its northern sources are the Burton Brook and the Broadmead Brook which join together just north of Castle Combe. The By Brook is then joined by the Doncombe Brook at Ford before reaching the Bristol Avon at Bathford. Once home to twenty watermill sites. In Roman times these were exclusively used for grinding corn, but by the end of the 12th Century, the mills were converted for wool fulling and in the 18th, 19th and well into the 20th Century for paper production. If you look carefully, remnants of stone weirs, undershot wheels, mill leats and sluice gates can still be seen in the undergrowth.

- ▶ *With the By Brook now on your right continue on the lower path to cross two stiles before coming to a metal sluice with footbridge. Cross the footbridge remembering to close the two gates behind you.*

Turn left, with the By Brook on your left continue to the two footbridges over the By Brook to enter the woods at the Rag Mill.



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Rag Mill

The Rag Mill was the first of three fulling mills on the By Brook in the late 16th century. It had the earliest paper machine in the By Brook valley, early 19th century. In the 1890's, rag-processing machinery was installed at the mill, and the 15 ft diameter undershot wheel, which can still be seen on the derelict site dates from that time. Also, clearly recognisable on the site is the remains of a rag boiler.

The mill, demolished in 1964, processed rags into individual fibres or 'stuff' which was transported in vats of elm mounted on bogies across the bridge to the Slaughterford/Chapps Mill for paper making.

In 2018, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens helped clear the Rag Mill site of dead or invasive trees and overgrowth to preserve the site. A plaque to mark this work, as part of the 50th anniversary of the Voluntary Warden Service, was placed on the Rag Mill gate.

Slaughterford Old Brewery

Looking through the Rag Mill site you can see the Old Brewery stack in the distance. There was a brewery at Slaughterford from 1858 until 1915 when it was ranked as one of the remotest inaccessible moderate sized breweries in the county.



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Rag Mill & Slaughterford Old Brewery

▶ *Continue down the track to emerge at Slaughterford Lane. Continue ahead and take Germain's Lane to the left until reaching the bridleway on your left. Follow the bridleway up through three gates to emerge onto a track, go left to Slaughterford Lane.*

Turn right and take care follow the lane for 250m to the first left bend.

Go through a gate on your right into the field and follow the fence line on your left to a stile in the hedge line. Cross the stile and continue ahead to another stile in the hedge line. From here, the public footpath goes diagonally across the large field, but due to constant farming, you may have to turn left instead and skirt the field to reach the Slaughterford Road and turn right.

Taking care follow the road for 530m until you reach a footpath on your right. Follow the footpath along the left-hand side of the field and go through a kissing gate. Follow the footpath until reaching a Cotswold type slabbed stile and step down into Challows Lane. Turn left going past Church Row towards The Green.

21 Church Row

On your left is a 19th century terrace of cottages with glazed Bridgewater tiles unique within the area. Retrace your steps past the church.

The Old Bakehouse dates to 1800 and was also a blacksmith's forge operated by Sam Attwood in 1839. The blocked doorways on the wall opposite mark the village pound.

Take the alley behind the wellhead and enter Cuttle Lane to the left. The 17th/18th Little House was once Parker's Farm with a butcher's shop in the blocked doorway. It also possessed a 'sociable' earth closet with provision for two adults and a child!

▶ *Continue along Cuttle Lane towards the traffic calming zone and take the ramp on the right up to the path that borders the cricket field to end the walk back at the Village Hall.*

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The Countryside Code

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any way signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Take only pictures and leave only footprints

Biddestone Village History

For further information, please see:
www.biddestonevillage.co.uk

This leaflet was sponsored and supported by the following, to whom many thanks:

- Chippenham Town Council
- Cotswold Conservation Board
- Corsham Town Council
- Corsham Walking Festival
- Biddestone Parish Council
- Wiltshire Council

Safety Information

Please be aware that you are walking this route at your own risk. At all times you are expected to use your own judgement regarding personal safety before proceeding along any of the routes on the Biddestone Heritage Trail.

A separate section in this leaflet refers to extracts from the Countryside Code that provides general advice on walking in the countryside.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk back in time through parts of the historic villages of Biddestone, Slaughterford and Ford.

It is advisable to use Ordnance Survey map Explorer No.156 Chippenham and Bradford-on-Avon (1;25,000) in conjunction with this leaflet.



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Other Heritage Trails:

- Box Heritage Trail
- Colerne Heritage Trail
- Corsham Heritage Trails
- Corsham Peacock Heritage Trails

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