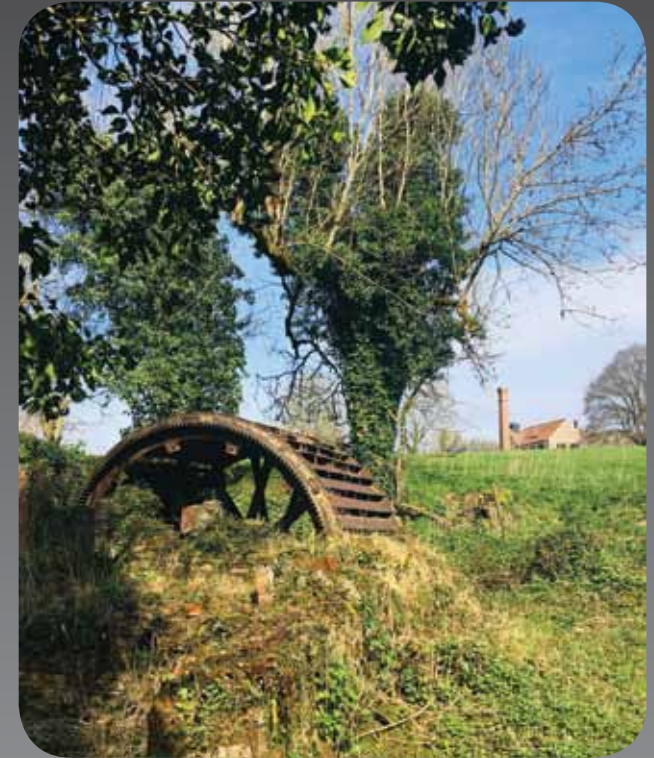


# Corsham to Biddestone Peacock Trail



The walk is 10.3 miles long and has a total ascent of 1117 feet and follows Public Rights of Ways (PRoW). It is a challenging walk, on footpaths and bridleways, with some steep gradients or rough terrain and across fields with a number of stiles to climb over. Suitable footwear and clothing are required as parts of the walk are through woodland and muddy footpaths.

The walk starts at the Springfield Community Campus on Beechfield Road, SN13 9DN. There is a public car park to the rear of the Campus and the nearest bus stops are at Newlands Road, SN13 0BH and Valley Road SN13 9DT.

## Introduction

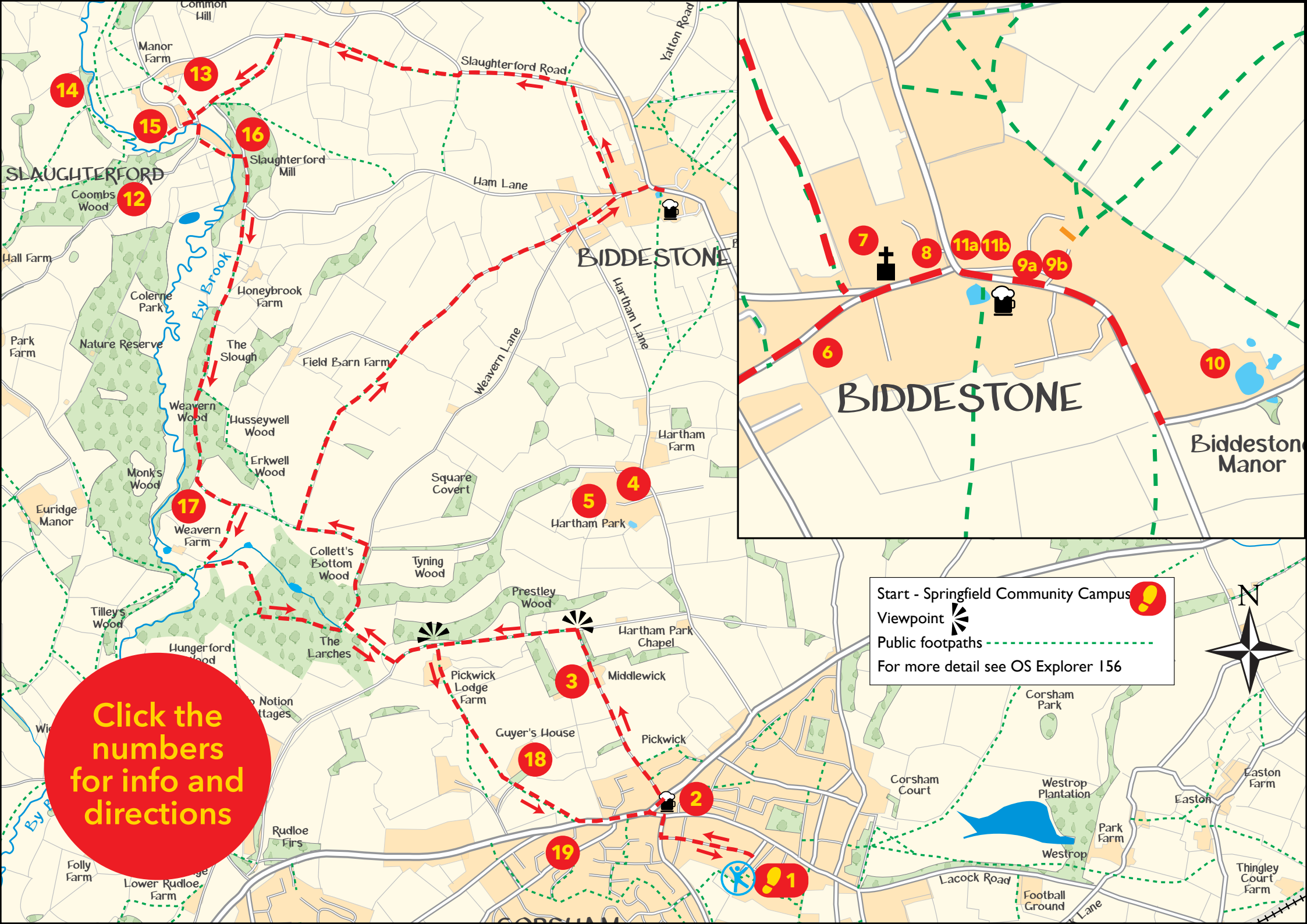
This walk explores the area between Corsham, Biddestone and Slaughterford discovering the hidden valleys and hills that provide far-reaching views. On leaving the Springfield Campus the walk visits Pickwick then out to Middlewick House and the old turnpike road with views out to Hartham Park House. The walk then goes across a valley and fields to visit Biddestone.

The trail passes many of the fine listed buildings in Biddestone before heading out across fields and down the hillside into Slaughterford.

Dropping down into Slaughterford, the trail passes through the grounds of St Nicholas' Church. A visit to the Rag Mill is included before returning through Chapps Mill (Slaughterford Mill) to follow the Weavern Lane and down to the By Brook at the now derelict Weavern Farm.

Ascending back up through Collett's Bottom Wood and then down through The Larches before emerging once more at Pickwick Lodge Farm. Passing by Guyers House the walk then returns to the start through a residential area of Corsham.

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



14

13

15

16

12

17

5

4

3

18

19

1

7

8

11a 11b

9a 9b

6

10

Start - Springfield Community Campus   
Viewpoint   
Public footpaths   
For more detail see OS Explorer 156



Click the numbers for info and directions

SLAUGHTERFORD

BIDDESTONE

BIDDESTONE

Biddeston Manor

CORSHAM

## 1 Springfield Community Campus

The walk starts from the Springfield Campus built in 2015 to replace the old Corsham Library and Community Centre. In WWII this area was once the Married Quarters Site No.1

- ▶ *Turn left and follow Beechfield Road to Valley Road and turn right towards Pickwick Road and left to reach the Hare and Hounds.*

## 2 Pickwick

Pickwick village was once a separate settlement from the Corsham community and now forms the northwestern part of the town. The name derives from the Anglo Saxon word pic (meaning a peak or pointed hill) and wic (village). Corsham was the inspiration for Charles Dickens' novel *The Pickwick Papers*. It is said that he borrowed the name from Moses Pickwick, a coachman who was found abandoned as a baby in Pickwick, lived in the "Hare and Hounds" inn, and later ran coaches between Bath and London. Samuel Pickwick is a fictional character and the main protagonist in *The Pickwick Papers*, the first novel by author Charles Dickens.

- ▶ *At the Hare and Hounds, cross the main A4 road and turn right taking the first turning on the left up Middlewick Lane past the allotments on your right to Middlewick House on your left.*



Springfield Community Campus



Pickwick

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map

**3**

## Middlewick House

Middlewick House is the home of Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason CBE and his actress wife Annette Lynton Mason, who acquired it from the previous owners, Andrew and Camilla Parker Bowles, now Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, in 1995. The Masons occasionally open the gardens to visitors, to raise money for charity.

- ▶ *Continue up the avenue of trees and turn left towards Hillsgreen Lodge. On your right can be seen Hartham House & Park.*

**4**

## Hartham House & Park

Originally a former Tudor farmstead in the 15th century it was replaced by Hartham House that was built between 1790-1795. Originally designed by James Wyatt, and set today in 50 acres that was landscaped by Harold Peto the famous garden designer of the late Victorian period. From the time of the Battle of Britain onwards, the upper floors were used as dormitories housing one hundred members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force from the Royal Air Force's No. 10 Group, RAF Fighter Command, based at the nearby RAF Rudloe Manor. Hartham Park is now an active business campus.

- ▶ *Continue past Hillsgreen Lodge on to the gravelled road towards Pickwick Lodge Farm. This gravelled road was once part of the main turnpike road from London to Bath, established in the 1600s.*



Middlewick House



Hartham House & Park

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map

**5**

## Sticke Tennis Court

As you walk along the Turnpike Road on your right on the horizon to the left of Hartham House, is the Grade II\* listed wooden 1904 Stické Tennis Court building. This is one of only three remaining Stické Tennis Courts in the world. Corsham has a Stické Tennis Club.

► *Keep walking in the same direction with Pickwick Lodge Farm on your left go through the kissing gate and follow the path to the end of the fence and then turn right going downhill though another kissing gate. Then taking care go steeply downhill to reach the bottom left of the valley floor. Go through the kissing gate and turn right, going uphill follow the track until you reach Weavern Lane. Turn left and continue along the lane until reaching a footpath on your right. Go across the stile and stay to the left of the hedgerow and follow the path to emerge onto a lane that arrives at Biddestone Cemetery. Continue ahead along The Butts to St. Nicholas's Church.*

**6**

## The Butts

(i.e. an archery shooting field, with mounds of earth used for the targets or "butt" an abutting strip of land).

The village archery butts, probably derived from the Anglo-French word 'bouter' to expel,



*Sticke Tennis Court*

established by King Henry III's archery law of 1252. The walk passes the homesteads of; Westbury, Nos.2 and 3 The Butts and Greystones to Mountjoy Farm. The law 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. Later in 1363 Edward III's law commanded obligatory practice of archery on Sundays and holidays. This: "...forbade, on pain of death, all sport that took up time better spent on war training especially archery practice". It is now a conservation area but once had a pond used to soak withies for basket making, traces of which are still visible.

7

## 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 of the Mountjoy family amongst them.

After St. Nicholas' Church in Slaughterford had been destroyed by Cromwell's men in 1649, a small gallery was built in Biddestone's St. Nicholas' in 1712 to hold the Slaughterford congregation. Arguments between the parishioners meant this gallery once had a separate door!

▶ *Continue past St. Nicholas' Church and pass the Wellhead and Village Pump to reach Turnpike Cottage. Carefully cross Church Road to the White Hart and duck pond.*

8

## Wellhead and Village Pump

The 1870s stone-tiled wellhead and cast-iron pump is an example of the wealthy local owner of Hartham Park, Thomas Henry Allen Poynder Esq's. social improvement to Biddestone. Mains water reached the village in 1955. The pump was capped after local teenagers flooded the street during their many assignations around the wellhead!



St. Nicholas' Church



Wellhead and Village Pump

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## 9a Turnpike Cottage

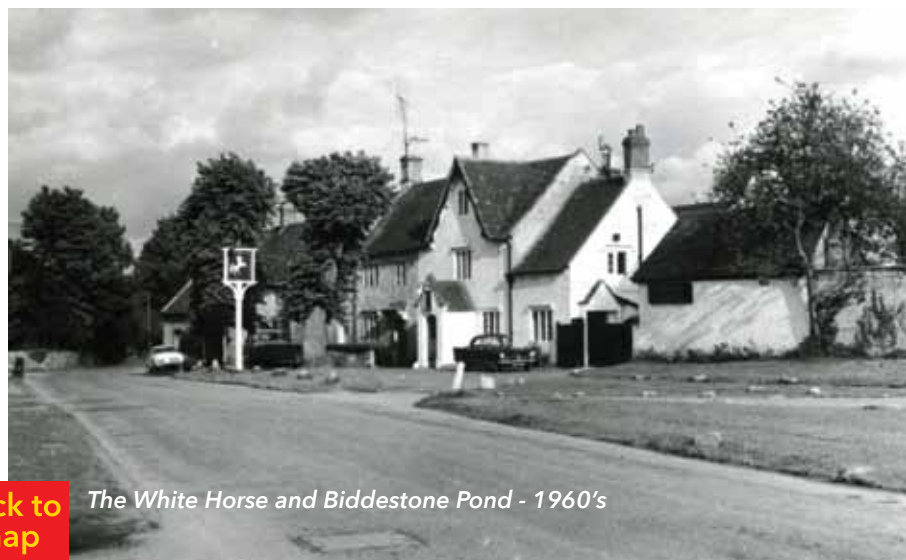
Turnpike Trusts, with trustees drawn from local landowners and other worthies, improved roads locally from 1725 onwards. A Turnpike keeper charged a standard fee from travellers to pay for upkeep of the road and to make a profit. Sheep and cattle drovers who stayed overnight on the village green.

## The White Horse and Biddestone Pond

Carefully cross the road to the White Horse, where refreshments and toilet facilities are available if required. The 19th century hostelry, backed by a malthouse, was called the George Inn in the mid 17th century. John Aubrey mentioned that: '...the beere that is brewed of the well there is diuretique.' Used to cure a 'fitt of the mother' it must have been strong indeed. Thomas Poynder added a new porch and his initials in 1872.

Biddestone pond was created by William Mountjoy to improve his pasture grounds in about 1661. The spring that feeds it never goes dry and once was a brook, called the Wavering, which ran through the centre of The Green.

In the 1740s the stream was placed in a sunken pipe. The Wavering stream meets the Pudding Brook to the west of Chippenham where it eventually enters the River Avon.



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The White Horse and Biddestone Pond - 1960's

## 9b 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, he is buried in St. Nicholas' churchyard extension off Bye Lane. The others lie in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and at sea.

▶ *Continue past The Green and War Memorial to carefully follow the road and left down Chippenham Lane to view Biddestone Manor.*



War Memorial

## 10 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. The manor has extensive grounds with ponds and a brick gazebo alongside the Corsham road.

▶ *Retrace your steps back towards the village.*



Biddestone Manor

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## 11a 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 cottage gets its name from the three gables that 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.*

## Willow House

Most spectacular is the tall three-storey, iron gated, Willow House built in 1730 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.

- ▶ *Follow the path through The Green. Across the road and opposite the village pond is The Close, a large house with grounds set back behind a high stone wall.*



Gable Cottage



Willow House

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## 11b The Close

The Close was converted from three cottages in 1929. Although much altered in the 17th century it contains late mediaeval panelled stonework, and 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.

► *Cross over into Church Road and to St. Nicholas' Church taking care along the road.*

*Continuing past St. Nicholas' Church take the right fork down Challows Lane where a huge Wellington Pine stands. Take the footpath on the right, over a stone slab stile to follow the footpath through two fields and a kissing gate to emerge onto the Slaughterford Road. Turn left.*

***Taking care,** follow the road for 530m until you reach the junction of two footpaths on your left. Take the righthand footpath that goes diagonally across the large field, but due to constant farming, you may have to turn right instead and skirt the field to reach a stile in the hedge line.*

*Cross the stile and go diagonally right across the field to another stile in the hedge line corner adjacent to a gate. Crossing the stile follow the fence line on your right to exit the field through a gate on to the Slaughterford Road.*

*Turn left and taking care follow the lane for 250m until turning left up a track to the bridleway on the right. Follow the bridleway through the woods and three gates to emerge onto Germain's Lane. Turn right and follow the lane into Slaughterford.*



## 12 Slaughterford

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

- ▶ *Follow the lane around to the right past Brookside Cottage onto the elevated footpath passing an Edward VII post box, set in the wall, to the entrance of Slaughterford's St. Nicholas' Church. Enter the church grounds via the metal gate to visit the church.*



Slaughterford

## 13 St Nicholas' Church, Slaughterford

St. Nicholas' Church was wrecked by Oliver Cromwell's troops and lay in ruin 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. There is a very old elm tree growing in the churchyard with a stone seat positioned around the trunk, which is reported to be 14 feet in circumference.

- ▶ *Retrace your steps back to Brookside Cottage and take the footpath on your right for 150m to view the Rag Mill and a little further on to the By Brook.*



St Nicholas' Church, Slaughterford

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map

## 14 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, albeit that a few mills reverted back to grinding corn.

## 15a Rag Mill

Rag Mill was the first of three fulling mills on the stream 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, being served by a much shorter leat from the next sluice upstream from the mill. 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. The water wheel power was supplemented by a gas engine, and ran shafts and pulleys to a cutting machine and conveyor belt, as well as a grindstone to sharpen the cutting machine blades.

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.



## 15b 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 it was ranked as one of the remotest inaccessible moderate sized breweries in the county.

- ▶ *Retrace your steps back onto Slaughterford Lane and walk ahead to cross over the bridge over the By Brook past the entrance to Slaughterford Mill. Take the lane on your left and follow the By Way on your left to pass through the mill site.*

## 16 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. In 1805 the mill was converted to produce paper by Charles Ward and partner William Duckett. By 1818, the mill had been converted to cloth and the paper machinery was put up for sale. By 1827 the mill reverted back to paper making, until it closed under W Dowding in 1994.

The By Brook approaching the mill was re-routed at a high level, and wider than the natural brook, to provide a reservoir of water.

- ▶ *The By Way emerges onto Germain's Lane. Turn right and follow the lane past Ham Lane and Honey Brook Farm on your left to join Weavern Lane. Continue ahead for 1.3km until reaching a bridleway gate on your right. Go carefully downhill, turn right to reach Weavern Farm on your right.*



Rag Mill & Slaughterford Old Brewery



Slaughterford Mill (Chapps Mill)

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## 17 Weavern Mill

Weavern Mill was probably named after the meandering banks of the By Brook. It was known as Veverne Mill in the 16th century. Between 1595-1608 three water mills were housed there under one roof (one ancient fulling mill, a corn and a grist fulling mill). This mill was also making paper in 1802. It ceased working in 1834 and there is now only a disused leat to the east of the By Brook to tell of its existence.

- ▶ *Continue left uphill following the track to enter the woods. Proceed uphill and turn left at a stone gate post, go carefully downhill. At the kissing gate go right uphill. Retrace your steps back to Pickwick Lodge Farm but this time turn right down Guyers Lane. Take the footpath on the left across two fields to reach the A4 opposite St. Patrick's Catholic Church, passing Guyers House on the left.*



Weavern Mill

## 18 Guyers House

Guyers House is hidden in the trees to the left/north-west. Originally it was a one-room farmhouse owned by the Snelling family who named it 'Snellings' in 1670. Around 1830, it was renamed 'Guyers'. Today, it is a 37 en-suite bedroom Hotel & Restaurant.

## 19 Pickwick School, Glove and Gas Mask Factories and Catholic Church

The church was originally built in 1858 as the mid-Victorian 'Pickwick District School' for up to 165 children on land gifted in 1846 by Lord Methuen. The school closed in 1922 and was used for a while as a Glove Factory during the 1930s. It later became a Gas Mask Factory for a short while during WWII.

Due to the need of hundreds of Catholic Irish workers that suddenly arrived in Corsham from 1938 onwards, the building was purchased in 1944 by Bishop Lee from the Diocese of Clifton, who blessed and opened it as the Corsham Catholic Church on 17 April 1945.

▶ *Turn left at A4 to Pickwick; take care crossing A4, and retrace walk back to Springfield Campus.*



Guyers House



Pickwick School, Glove and Gas Mask Factories and Catholic Church

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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

## Corsham Historic Past

For further information on Corsham heritage, please visit the Corsham Bookshop and its comprehensive set of books by local author Julian Carosi (*'Corsham Revealed'* published 2018, *'Corsham Revealed More'* 2019, and *'Corsham Revealed Three'* 2020).

## Biddestone Village History

For further information, please see:

[www.biddestonevillage.co.uk](http://www.biddestonevillage.co.uk)

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

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

## 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 Corsham to Biddestone Peacock 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 market town of Corsham and the Cotswolds villages of Biddestone and Slaughtertford.

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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Produced by Barry Cox, David Wright, and Ian Rooney.  
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Text and photos by Graham Priest, Julian Carosi and Barry Cox

Designed by Bob Child: [www.peartreestudios.co.uk](http://www.peartreestudios.co.uk)

### Other Heritage Trails:

- Box Heritage Trail
- Biddestone Heritage Trail
- Coleme Heritage Trail
- Corsham Heritage Trails
- Corsham Peacock Heritage Trails

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