



The Bidford History Trail

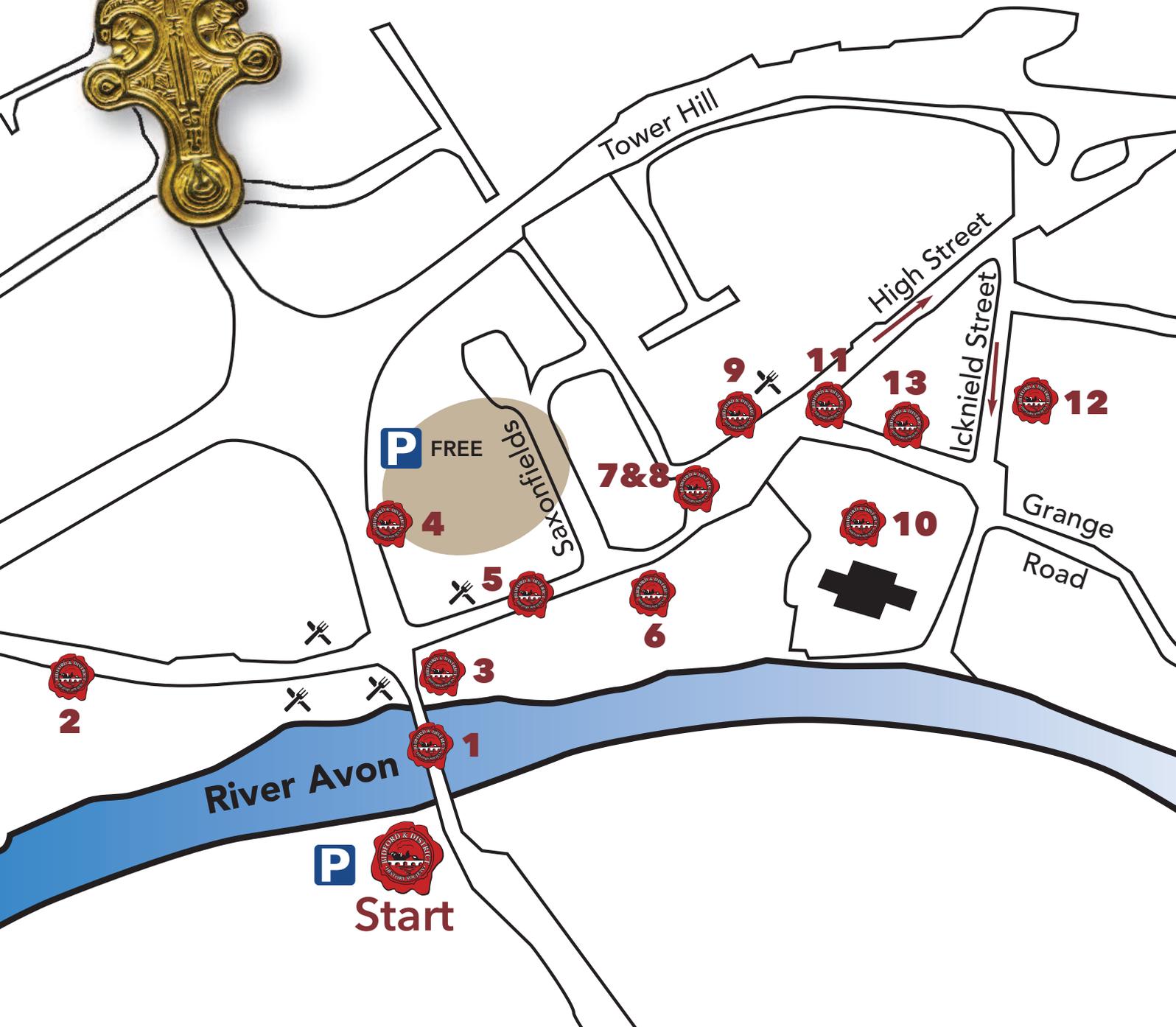
Bringing History To Life

Great-square-headed brooch, dating to the early Anglo-Saxon period. Found during an archeological dig in Bidford in 1971. Photograph by kind permission of Warwickshire Museum



We invite you to explore Bidford's rich and varied past on a Heritage Trail through time. The landmarks on the Trail reflect Bidford's history from Roman times to the present. However, stone tools discovered by the River Avon are evidence of a settlement dating as far back as the Paleolithic period (early Stone Age) over 10,000 years ago.

The trail will take you approximately 45 minutes.



1. Bidford Bridge



This Grade I listed bridge dates from the early 15th century and is said to have been built by the monks of Bordesley Abbey. It has had many renovations over the centuries: in 1545 (Henry VIII's reign) it was repaired and again in 1641

costing £180, only for Charles I's army to destroy it covering the King's retreat from Worcester to Oxford in 1644. This damage was not repaired until 1650. The arches were heightened in the late 18th century when the Avon was made navigable up to Stratford. There is a flash lock below the bridge. The monks clearly did a good job as the bridge has survived centuries of changing modes of transport – during World War II the American troop from Long Marston would drive their tanks across it! The latest renovation work was necessary after a tractor hit the parapet of the bridge in July 2015. During Bidford's periodic floods it serves as an unintentional pier when the Honeybourne Road disappears under water!

2. Bell Court



The present building dates from the 19th century though the land was held by various families during the middle ages and in 1500 was referred to as "Bellyncourt" when it was seized by William Harewell along with 30 acres of land in Bidford. In 1623 it was recorded as a manor whose owner, Edward

Lingen, was later pronounced a lunatic. His son Henry, who inherited it, was a prominent Royalist and was knighted by King Charles I in 1645. He was taken prisoner in 1646 at the fall of Goodrich Castle to the Parliamentarians and died impoverished in 1662 so may have had to sell Bell Court.

In 1791 the 8 bells in the church tower were brought up the river from Gloucester, where they were cast, and landed at what was then called Bell Close.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bell Court was the home of the author Barbara Comyns who wrote entertainingly about her unconventional upbringing with her 5 sisters in her book 'Sisters By a River'. One of her books, 'Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead', was about a French village where everyone was insane and was apparently modelled on Bidford! During World War II Bell Court was used to provide temporary classrooms for evacuees from Coventry.

3. The Old White Lion



Built of whitewashed brick, this former hotel dates back to the 17th century. From 1621 until 1832 the Court Leet (a special manorial court with jurisdiction over crime and trading practices) was held here where the medieval tradition (which ceased after the dissolution of the monasteries) of

an 'assay' (testing) of beer and bread was carried on under the title of Bread Weighers and Beer Tasters.

At the beginning of the 20th century cattle sales were held here. The hotel continued to be a meeting place for many village gatherings, including the Victorian United Patriots Benefit Society. At a meeting in January 1900 "the chairman gave the loyal toast, remarking that they all rejoiced in having her Majesty (Victoria) to reign over them at the beginning of the 20th century". For many years it was regarded as the best eating place in the village but it has now been converted into flats.

4. Saxonfields



The Anglo-Saxons created a settlement here and an Anglo-Saxon burial ground (the largest in the Avon Valley) was uncovered during excavation work in 1921 and again in the 1970s in the car park

adjacent to the roundabout. (A plaque on the wall facing the One Stop shop marks the spot). Skeletons with wonderful jewels, shields, brooches, rings and other artefacts dating back to AD 500 were discovered in 1922 and put on display in the Assembly Rooms where the Bridge Restaurant now stands. They are now located in Warwick Museum. Finds recovered such as loom weights and quern stones reveal that everyday activities were practised such as cloth weaving and grinding corn.

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5. The High Street



This was the hub of the village and full of shops throughout the 19th and much of the 20th century. With no supermarkets and limited transport, villagers relied on shops in the village for everything from

food to clothing and household goods. By 1861 Bidford was a thriving village where its 950 inhabitants could buy everything they needed. As the population grew, so did the number of shops. Look up the High Street and imagine the scene in the 1930s when there were 3 butchers' shops and a slaughter house, a fishmonger as well as a fish and chip shop, a ladies' clothing shop and a gentlemen's outfitters, a garage, a bank, a chemist's shop, 3 sweet shops, 2 green grocers, 2 grocery stores, 2 bakeries, a Co-op department store selling everything from food to clothing, 3 barbers, a boot and shoe shop, a cobbler's, a toy shop, an ironmonger's, 2 dairies, a saddler's, a coal merchant, cafes, a police station, 4 pubs and a hotel, a newsagents and a Post Office. Imagine the street full of people shopping – the noise of villagers' voices, the sight of animals (horses pulling coal carts and milk carts, animals being driven up the street to the butchers for slaughter!), the mixed smells of cattle, of food from the bakeries, sweet shops, grocers and of cigarette smoke and alcohol coming from the pubs.



Number 49A High Street, still has the Butcher's shop rail where the meat was hung outside the shop;

Number 58 High Street, site of the Co-op. Can you see the Co-op sign of the beehive on the wall?

6. The Old Health Centre



Bidford was a small settlement during Roman times and the remains of a Roman ford were discovered behind the health centre during dredging operations in the river during the 1970s when the piles were still visible in the mud. Many Roman finds have been located in

and around the village. It is also believed that there was a villa and market here during the Roman occupation.

7. The War Memorial



This was unveiled on the 23rd April 1923 by Henry 'Paddy' Locke who had been a serving soldier before 1914 and fought throughout the First World War. During the Great War nearly 240 men from the parish joined up to fight and the names of 63 of those men who died are recorded along with 10 men who died during World War II.

The original plaques were replaced in 2014.

8. Lloyds Bank and houses behind the War Memorial



These date from the mid-16th century. In 1567 Bidford was certified as an 'ancient demesne' (land held by King William I at the time of the Domesday Book of 1086) and the village mace owned by the church may have been made around this time.

From Elizabethan times Bidford enjoyed the status of a borough, being governed by 2 bailiffs until 1788, with grants for a weekly market (from 1220) and fairs (from Elizabeth I's reign) in April and October.

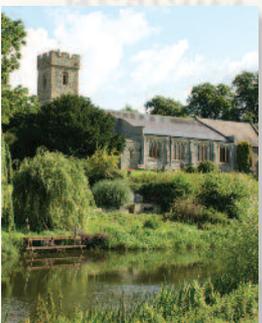


9. The Bull's Head pub



This was a slaughter house over 200 years ago, hence its name. It was run by the Spiers family for over 140 years until the 1990s.

10. St Laurence's Church



There has been a church here since 1206. The tower dates from the 13th century and has 8 bells, the earliest dating from 1791. The church clock dates from 1683 and has been repaired in 1887 and again in 1953. The church underwent several restorations in the mid-17th century and in 1835 when most of the stonework was broken up to repair the road to the church. The church itself was almost entirely re-built of blue lias stone in 1855. It is

normally not open to visitors but the churchyard contains some interesting gravestones and its southern end offers a pleasant view of the River Avon and the surrounding countryside.



11. The Old Falcon



(On the corner of Church Street) Built in 1530, this distinctive L-shaped building was a pub until the late 18th century. Its chief claim to fame is the well-known legend of William Shakespeare's visit as part of a drinking group who challenged the Bidford Sippers in the Old Falcon

to a drinking match. The Stratford team lost and it was said that Shakespeare was so drunk that he had to be carried up the hill (some versions have him falling from a horse!) going towards Stratford. He climbed into a crab-apple tree where, surveying all the surrounding villages, described them as:



"Piping Pebworth, Dancing Marston, Haunted Hillborough, Hungry Grafton, Dodging Exhall, Papist Wixford, Beggarly Broom and Drunken Bidford".

Perhaps the description of Bidford is particularly apt given the existence of at least 8 pubs in the village in the 18th century! In 1651 the Old Falcon was allegedly the place where the future King Charles II addressed his followers before marching to the Battle of Worcester. In the early 19th century it was the parish workhouse before becoming the Bidford Institute and Working Men's Reading Room in the 1860s. Latterly it saw use as an antiques showroom but is now split into two private houses.

12. Icknield Street



This takes its name from the old Roman road of Ryknild Street running roughly south-west to north-east from the Fosse Way at Bourton-on-the-Water to South Yorkshire though the

Icknield Street of today most probably does not follow the route of the original Roman road. The road was made from stone slabs set over gravel and the gravel, which would have been used for the ford (river crossing), could have come from the sand and gravel quarry located just west of the Roman road.

The fire station initially consisting of a captain, lieutenant, 12 men and a manual engine was based here until the early 1980s. There was also a blacksmith's forge here from the 19th to the early 20th century.

You can continue down Grange Road and at the bottom on the right is Avonside, a private house which was a maternity hospital during World War II where many women came from badly bombed Birmingham or Coventry to have their babies. Keep following the path which leads to a lock on the river.

13. St Laurence's Church Hall



This was the original village school, built in the early part of the 19th century and enlarged in 1846 to accommodate 160 children. The 1861 census recorded 112 children in receipt of an education. In 1872 a new school building (which has now been demolished) with a house for the schoolmaster was erected in Victoria Road. However, the hall continued to be used as the infant school until 1950. In 1900 the Infants school had an average attendance of 80 pupils.

We hope you have enjoyed this brief glimpse into Bidford's past.