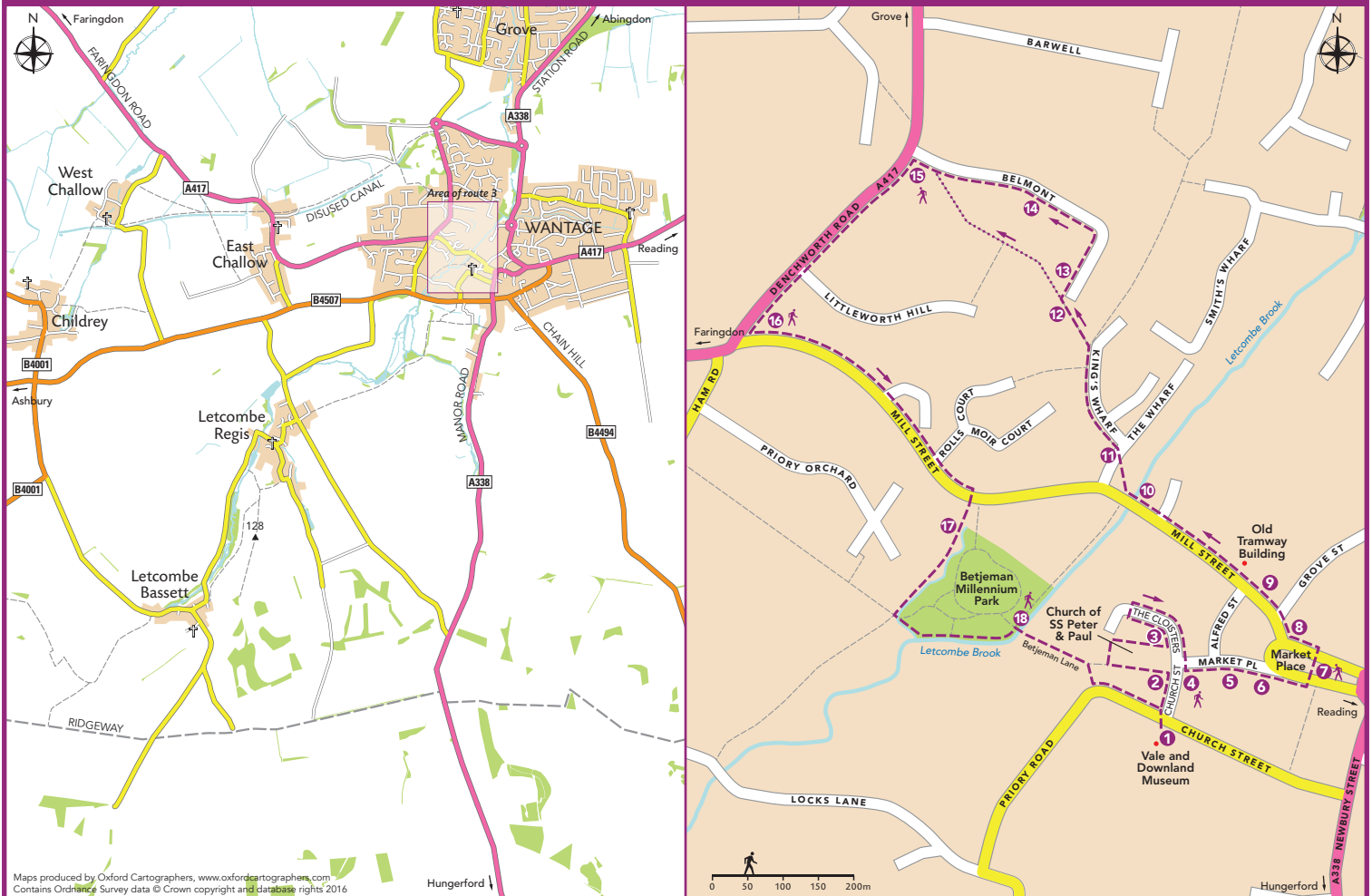


## WANTAGE AREA WALKS & CYCLE ROUTES



### Route 3 - Victorian Wantage Part 1

The ancient market town of Wantage sits on the Letcombe Brook, at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. The town is characterised by 16th century timber framed houses refaced in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in red brick. In 1847 Wantage became an educational and spiritual centre for the Oxford Movement, and the vicar of the parish church, Rev William Butler, was responsible for several fine buildings in the town centre.

This walk is in two parts, Route 3 and Route 4; together they total about four miles and form a figure of eight, with the Museum and Market Place at the centre. It is worth mentioning that John Betjeman, that lover of Victorian architecture, chose to live here from 1946-1972.

**FIRST CIRCULAR WALK**  
about 2 miles - some hill climbing.

**1** From the Museum cross Church Street into the minor road opposite. In front of you is the parish church of SS Peter and Paul, 13th century, renovated during the 1850's and extended one bay westwards in 1877 by Rev William Butler who appointed the architects.



**2** Follow the churchyard wall to reach a pedestrian opening. Turn left onto the churchyard footpath - If the church is open, (10:30 to 12:30 daily) explore within.

The main altar was renovated by GE Street who also designed the west window and possibly

the pulpit. He later designed the Law Courts in the Strand. Butterfield, better known for Keble College, Oxford, and a pupil of Street, designed the extension as well as the font cover. Walk around the church to where you entered the churchyard.



**3** Turn left along the churchyard boundary northwards to reach the former vicarage, also designed by Street in 1850. Back track to the east end of the parish church.

**4** Turn left past the Swan and follow the footpath into the market place. Look up at the signs and terracotta swags of fruit and foliage above the windows.

**5** The buildings on the north side of the market place have been mainly demolished and replaced with modern frontages. The surviving older buildings of the market place are mainly 16th century timber framed, encased in brick frontages in the 18th century.

**6** Follow the footpath to reach the open space known as the VC forecourt outside Barclays Bank and the Bear Hotel. Look north, on the corner of Grove Street and Mill Street is a building with Roman numerals on the upper gable. This is the former Town Hall, opened



in 1878. The previous Town Hall 1835-75 was demolished to make way for the Statue of King Alfred, erected in 1877.

**7** On your right, between the two coffee shops, is the Victoria Cross Gallery. This was built by Lord Wantage VC to house a collection of paintings by Desanges of the recipients of the Victoria Cross which he bought and gifted to the people of Wantage. Note the blue plaque on the left hand side of the entrance and the bronze replicas of the VC. Following the changes to the north west corner of the market place, the 16th century buildings were 'Victorianised' or replaced by the buildings dated 1884 and 1894.

**8** Cross the market square by the pedestrian crossing, pausing halfway across the market place itself to admire the statue of King Alfred. This was commissioned by Robert Loyd-Lindsay, Baron Wantage who was a founder member of the British Red Cross, and the sculptor was Count Gleichen formerly known as Prince Victor Ferdinand Franz Eugen Gustaf Constantin Friedrich of Hohenlohe – Langeburg. Local tradition has it that it is a likeness of Baron Wantage.



Statue of King Alfred

**9** The corner of Mill Street has been widened and the new 'Victorian' side of the Bell public house added. Note the Bell hanging from the corner gable. Follow the footpath down Mill Street passing the Baptist Church 1860 and the former Wantage Tramway offices 1904 on the right. A steam tramway ran from here to Wantage Road Station, three miles away, from 1876 until 1945. There is a blue plaque on the west wall. The Alms Houses on the left were built about 1868.



Wantage Tramway Office

**10** Reaching the bottom of Mill Street and the mill leat bridge, look left. The old mill has Saxon origins and was converted to steam in 1860. The larger newer mill dates from 1910.



Mill

**11** Leave Mill Street at the open grass area. The white house on your left has a small first floor picture window facing you depicting a teddy bear riding a bird. This has been



Teddy bear window

associated with Betjeman's story 'Archie and the Strict Baptists' set in Wantage. Take the diagonal footpath, not the one that follows the Brook north, to reach the recently restored Wilts & Berks Canal Wharf Sack Hire Office 1806. Follow the footpath behind the Sack Hire Office, between the old stone walls cross the Letcombe Brook where it disappears into a conduit under the former Wilts & Berks Canal.



Sack Hiring Company Ltd

**12** Follow the path up the hill; at the first fork, the canal path turns right, to a second fork in the footpath. This is Belmont, the first 'housing



Belmont footpath

estate' in the town, built on a former nursery, Linden Gardens, from 1811 and throughout the Victorian Period.

**13** At the fork of the two footpaths, the white building is the former Cottage Hospital 1886 -1927. Note the faint trace of the letters in the screen between each floor. This building housed the Wantage Rural District Council offices until 1974. It has since been converted into four flats.

**14** Explore both footpaths; right with its narrow vehicular access contains the best Victorian examples. Caldecott Lodge has Passion Flower Tiles.

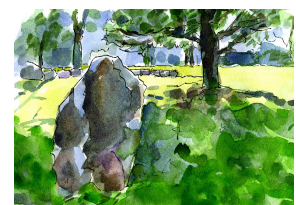
**15** Reaching the top of the hill, Denchworth Road, turn left and pass the Convent of St Mary the Virgin. This is not open to visitors but is visible from the road. The main building was designed by Street in 1854-56 with the small chapel in 1866, the later chapel to St Mary was built in 1877 by JL Pearson. At the end of the road, you reach Camel Crossroads, the former site of a public house.

**16** Turn left, down Mill Street, passing Victorian villas, to reach The Lamb public house.



The Lamb public house

**17** Turn right into the public footpath between The Lamb car park and Pegasus Court Retirement Home. This footpath follows upstream the channelled Letcombe Brook. Follow the footpath to where paths cross at the Goggs Bridge. Turn left and follow the mill leat with the main flow of water. Here you can enter the Betjeman Millennium Park and explore the circular footpath around the central area of Sarsen Stones.



Sarsen Stones

**18** Leave the park, or follow the leat to Lords Lane, recently renamed Betjeman Lane, and cross the Ironbridge to walk back up to the church and the Museum for coffee.



Betjeman Lane



Vale & Downland Museum

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Further copies of this route and others in the series are available from the Independent Advice Centre, Market Square, Wantage