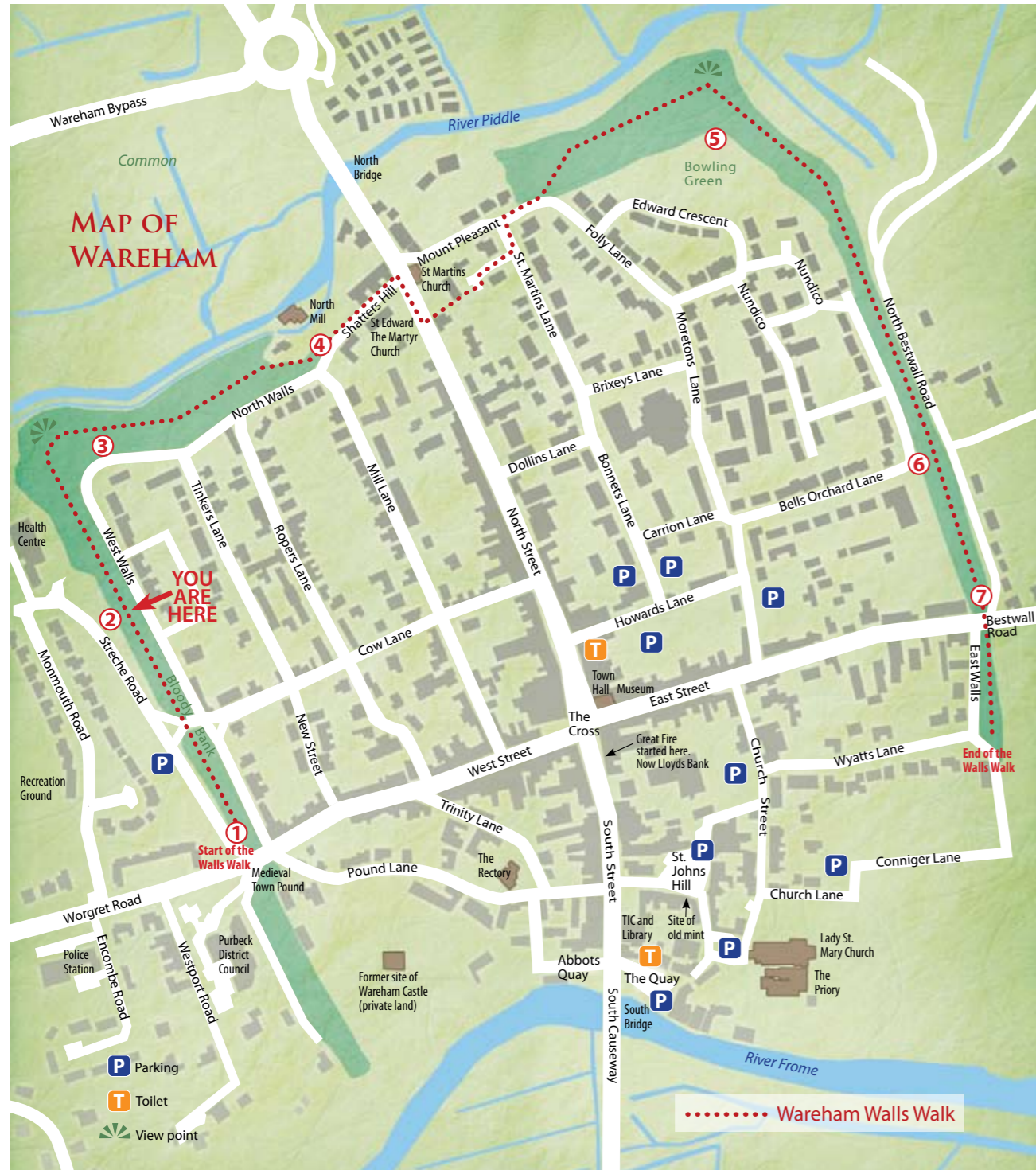


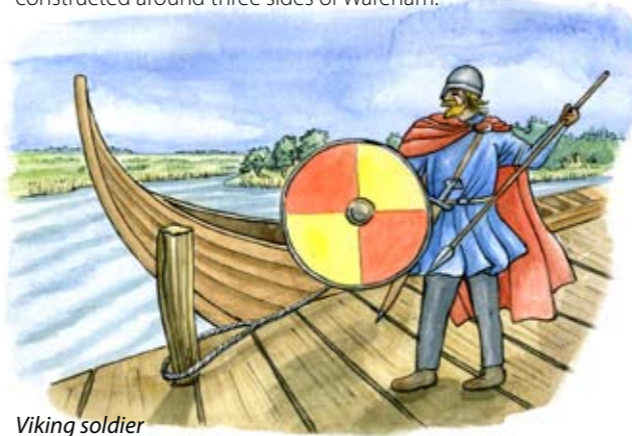
WAREHAM WALLS WALK ~ POINT 2, WEST WALLS



THE VIKING THREAT

The Vikings first came to England in AD 787, landed at Portland and killed the Reeve of Dorchester who mistook them for peaceful traders. Over the next 100 years, raids became frequent and were equally as bloody and violent, not only did the invaders devastate the land but they forced payment or 'tribute' in the form of coinage known as 'Danegeld'. By the 870s the Vikings under their leader Prince Guthrum were rapidly overpowering the country.

Alfred, king of Wessex, devised a policy both during and after this turbulent period to strengthen his kingdom by establishing 'fortified' sites (burh). These were strategically placed to guard the main route-ways and to ensure that his people were no more than 20 miles from a safe refuge in time of need. Documentary sources imply that by AD 875, massive earthen banks had been constructed around three sides of Wareham.



Viking soldier



Saxon defender and his house

SIZE IS EVERYTHING

A document known as the 'Burghal Hidage' was compiled in the early 900s AD and lists 31 fortified places in Wessex. It records that Wareham's walls were 2200 yards in extent and that it was the fourth largest 'burh' in the kingdom. Only Wallingford and Southwark on the River Thames, and Winchester, the royal capital were bigger.

Earthen 'walls' were constructed on the west, north and east sides of the town and enclose 100 acres – there were never any defences to the south by the River Frome. A total of 1600 men from the local area would have been called on to build and maintain these fortifications as well as making sure that the roads and bridges were kept in good order. The grid-like street pattern was laid out at this time and the town then consisted of simple houses clustered along the main streets, and the quayside. There was a nunnery and a large convent church (Lady St Mary) overlooking the river. It is likely that the Crown owned land and property in the town where tribute to the king in the form of rents, crops and food was stored.

BLOODY BANK

This stretch of the walls is so-called after two grizzly and gruesome episodes. In 1213, a hermit known as Peter de Pomfret and his son were allegedly tied to a horse's tail and dragged from Corfe Castle to Wareham, and hung here for prophesying that King John's unstable and brutal reign would come to a premature end. The traditional site for the hanging is here at Bloody Bank.



Hermit Peter de Pomfret and his son being dragged to their execution at Bloody Bank



Judge Jeffries

Four hundred years later, following the Monmouth uprising in 1685, Judge Jeffries at Dorchester Assizes sentenced five Dorset rebels to be 'hung, drawn and quartered' in the same place. The severed heads were displayed on a wooden tower set up on in the middle of the town.



Severed heads of the executed rebels

In the 1830s Bloody Bank was lowered and the soil used to fill in the ditch below so that a road could be constructed to the new workhouse on the western outskirts of the town. This building housed the poor and destitute from a wide area around Wareham.

BIODIVERSITY HOT SPOT

It is interesting to reflect that the Walls lie within a 10km² area that has the most diverse range of plants in the British Isles - a biodiversity hot spot!

Bloody Bank as a whole supports a moderate range of breeding butterflies, including a colony of common blue.



Bird's-foot trefoil



Common blue



Small Tortoiseshell

The western slope of dry, acid grassland contrasts with the neutral grassland habitat of the eastern side. Here you will find bird's-foot-trefoil, cut-leaved crane's-bill and some wild clary.

