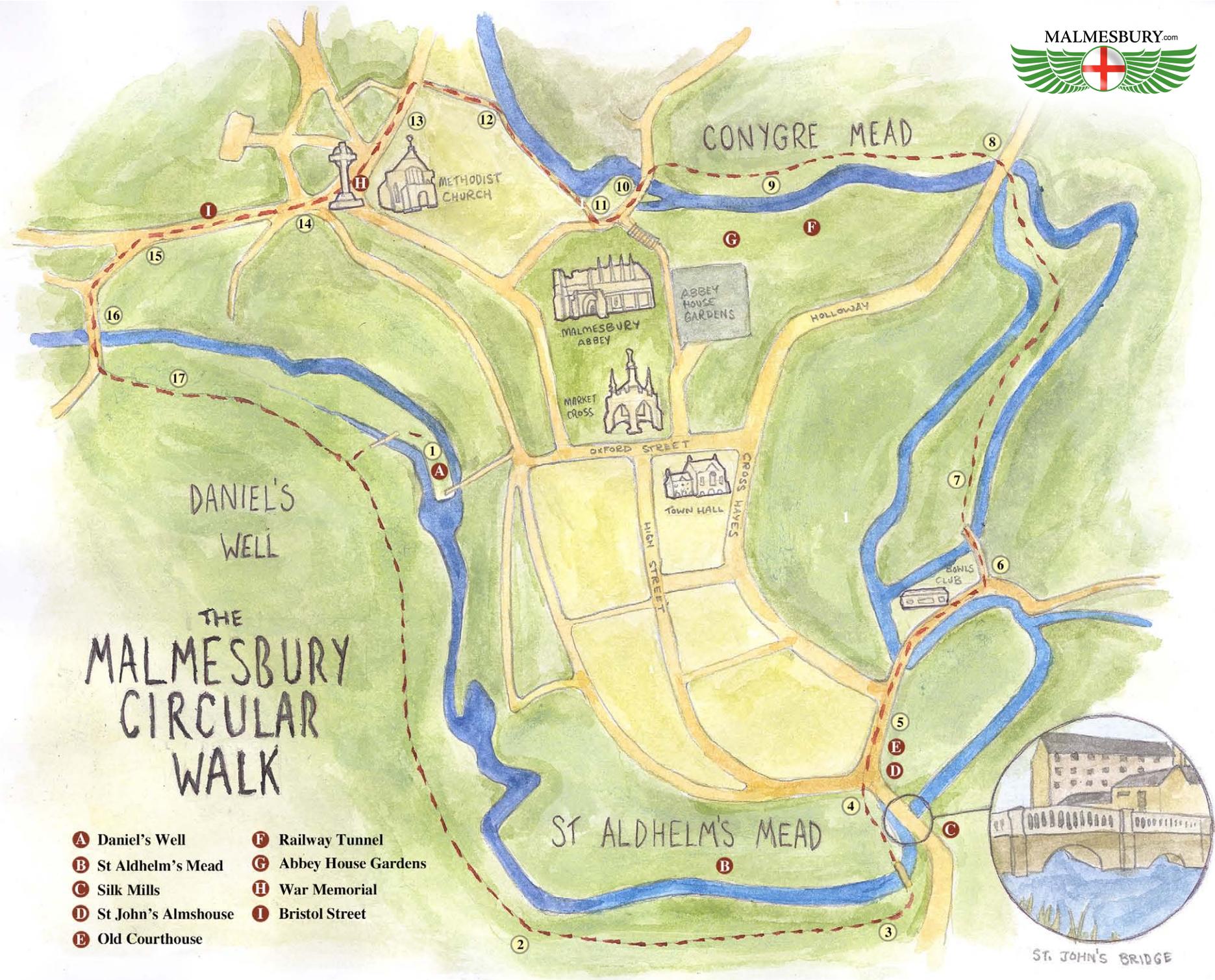


THE MALMESBURY RIVER WALK

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|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| A Daniel's Well | F Railway Tunnel |
| B St Aldhelm's Mead | G Abbey House Gardens |
| C Silk Mills | H War Memorial |
| D St John's Almshouse | I Bristol Street |
| E Old Courthouse | |

ST. JOHN'S BRIDGE

Malmesbury River Walk: Directions

(First of all, head to Daniel's Well. To reach it from the Town Hall and Cross Hayes car park, firstly head down Oxford Street, towards the Market Cross. Keep heading onwards towards the large mirror on the corner and head down the slope beneath it. Once you reach the bottom, turn right down the slope and at the base of this slope take an immediate left down an alleyway. This will lead you past the weir and over a bridge. When you can see the small stone footbridge you have reached Daniel's Well).

1. Now that you have found Daniel's Well (**A**), cross the stone footbridge and turn left into the fields. There should be a rough path in the grass to follow.
2. Keep heading in this direction, past St. Aldhelm's Mead (**B**) (used as the local park, you will see two goals marking out a football pitch) and over a series of small wooden footbridges.
3. Once you reach the end of the path exit via the wooden gate and turn left over the footbridge. You will see the Silk Mills (**C**) on your right.

4. Head along the footbridge and turn right through the metal gates (location of Malmesbury's Second World War memorial).
5. Cross the road and head down St. John's Street, past St. John's Almshouses (**D**) and the Old Courthouse (**E**) on your right.
6. Keep following the street and continue over the bridge. Once you have reached the corner of the bowling green turn left down the path you will now see.
7. Follow the footpath over the weir and across the fields running parallel to the river.
8. Cross over the road once you reach the end (you will see the Spice Merchant on your right) and head through the wooden gate leading onto the woodland path.
9. Follow the woodland path alongside the river. On your way you will see the old railway tunnel (**F**) and the Abbey House Gardens (**G**) on the other side of the river.
10. When you reach the end of the path and exit through the gate, turn left down the slope and head across the bridge you see ahead of you.
11. Head slightly up the slope but keep an eye out on your right for a small footpath running alongside the Millhouse on your right.

12. Follow this path alongside the river and head up the slope and steps until you reach Gloucester Road.
13. Turn left up the hill and head towards the First World War memorial at The Triangle (**H**).
14. At the memorial, bear right down Bristol Street (**I**) and walk along the pavement.
15. When you reach a fork in the road, turn left down Foxley Road and follow the bend round.
16. Cross the bridge and turn left to join a footpath running across the fields ahead.
17. Follow this and before long you will be back at Daniel's Well.

Malmesbury River Walk: History

(A) Daniel's Well

As you begin your walk you will have noticed a small stone footbridge. This marks the location of Daniel's Well, named after Daniel of Winchester, seen to be one of the great bishops of the early Church in England. The name supposedly derives from Daniel's regular act of self-mortification, during which he would stand up to his neck in cold water in the River Avon for many hours at a time.

(B) St. Aldhelm's Mead

As you cross the wooden footbridges you should be able to see St. Aldhelm's Mead, a large green space now used as a town park. The area is named after St. Aldhelm, a prominent early English bishop and one of the founding fathers of Malmesbury. Aldhelm, well respected and loved by the local community, had a huge influence in the surrounding area; in fact he built churches throughout most of South-West England.

On his death (c.709-710), Aldhelm's remains were carried to be buried in Malmesbury where his remains were enshrined, making Malmesbury an important centre of pilgrimage. This is when St. Aldhelm's Mead became particularly prominent. A feast and fair were held in honour of

Aldhelm on the 31st March every year at this location, a tradition that continued for centuries (until 1540, when it was discontinued due to rioting and debauchery).

(C) Malmesbury Silk Mills (Avon Mill)

Just across the road from the waterfall and footbridge is Avon Mill, the location of Malmesbury's 19th century Silk Mills. The site itself has in fact been the site of a mill since the 13th century. In about 1600, Avon Mill became a fulling mill (here, cloth was thickened and shrunk by pounding it in a solution of fullers earth) but a century later, the woolen industry in Malmesbury as a whole had closed down.

In 1852, after years of the site slipping in and out of use and various owners, it was bought by silk manufacturers Thomas Bridget & Co. of Derby. Silk ribbons were very much in demand in the Victorian era and at its peak the factory employed around 400 people. The business failed in 1899, but was reopened and by 1900 there were 150 workers. The mill was forced to close yet again that year but as before it reopened, this time in the early 1920's by Avon Silk Mills Co. Ltd. Silk production continued until 1941 and in 1984 both of the main buildings were converted into apartments.

(D) St. John's Almshouses

Just before the town bridge, as you cross the road, you will notice an engraved stone plaque high up on one of the buildings. This

marks the location of St. John's Almshouses, established in 1694 for poor and widowed women. The site was well utilised before this however, a gothic arch dating back to the 13th century indicates the remains of the old Priory of St. John of Jerusalem.

(E) The Old Courthouse

As you are walking down St. John's Street, on your right you will come across a gap between the buildings, at the end of which you will see a car park. If you head through the gap you will see the Old Courthouse, which has been used by Malmesbury's oldest society, the 'Old Corporation' (also known as the 'Commoners of Kings Heath'), since 1616.

Founded in 937 by King Athelstan, the 'Old Corporation' was started as a way of giving those that had fought for Athelstan a reward in the form of land from King's Heath (Malmesbury Common). This land was in turn passed down to descendents of these freemen, a tradition that continues until the present day. Malmesbury's members of parliament, of which it used to have two, were also once chosen by the Old Corporation itself, for a period of almost 600 years.

The organisation is still run by a High Steward, as it has done since its inception, who is elected by the town's Commoners. Its members have existed for over 1000 years in direct descent of those men who fought for Athelstan, making it one of the most exclusive 'clubs' in the world.

(F) Malmesbury Railway

The railway tunnel that you will see on the other side of the river, as you head along the woodland path, is a reminder of the branch line that used to run through Malmesbury. While difficult to visualise now, the branch line and station, established on 17th December 1877, brought huge improvements to Malmesbury's trade. Malmesbury's market held on the third Wednesday of every month prospered and saw its best attendance in 30 years in February 1878.

The railway was also well utilised in both of the world wars. The first saw large numbers of troops travelling through the town from nearby military bases and the second saw significant numbers of refugees coming to Malmesbury and the surrounding villages. Despite its usage, the railway soon closed down, first to passengers in September 1951 and then to goods in 1962.

(G) Abbey House Gardens

Across the river, and to the left of slope you will soon walk up, are the Abbey House Gardens. The main house was built for the Stumpe family in the latter half of the 16th century, headed by the wealthy clothier William Stumpe. William was responsible for significantly boosting Malmesbury's cloth trade, for which the town became renowned, and also helped to preserve the decaying Abbey after the

Reformation. Abbey House itself was passed onto William's second son, John Stumpe, who bought the property outright in 1592.

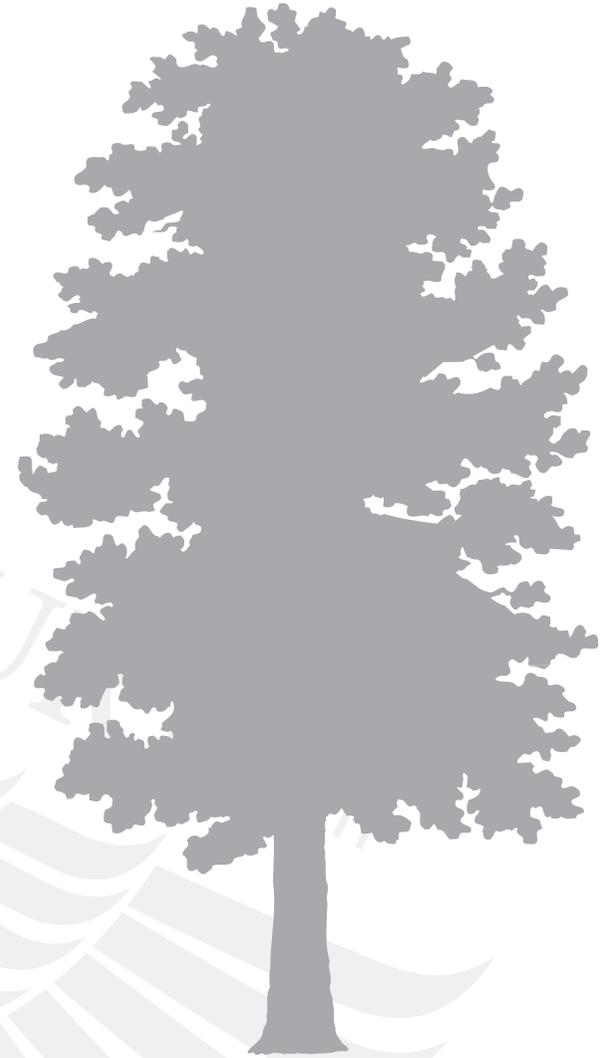
(H) The Triangle

Once you reach the top of Gloucester Road you will notice a First World War memorial straight ahead of you and a pub called The Three Cups to your right. This area of the town is known as The Triangle, and used to be the location of a bustling market centuries ago.

The First World War Memorial was dedicated in March 1921, and remembers 74 men and one civilian. The site of the Three Cups Inn has been occupied by a pub since the 15th century, with the present building dating back to the 17th century. In its earlier history, Elizabethan cloth and yarn traders would stay here and in 1643, it was reputedly the headquarters of General Waller, when he was besieging the town during the English Civil War.

(I) St. Helen's Church

While walking down Bristol Street, those with a keen eye may notice some odd stonework on the side of one of the houses on the ride hand side of the street. This is part of the original stonework of the oldest building in Malmesbury, St. Helen's Church, which dates back to the early Anglo-Saxon period. It is now part of a much newer building of course, but it is a stark reminder of just how old Malmesbury is.



Written by Jason Peel for Malmesbury.com

