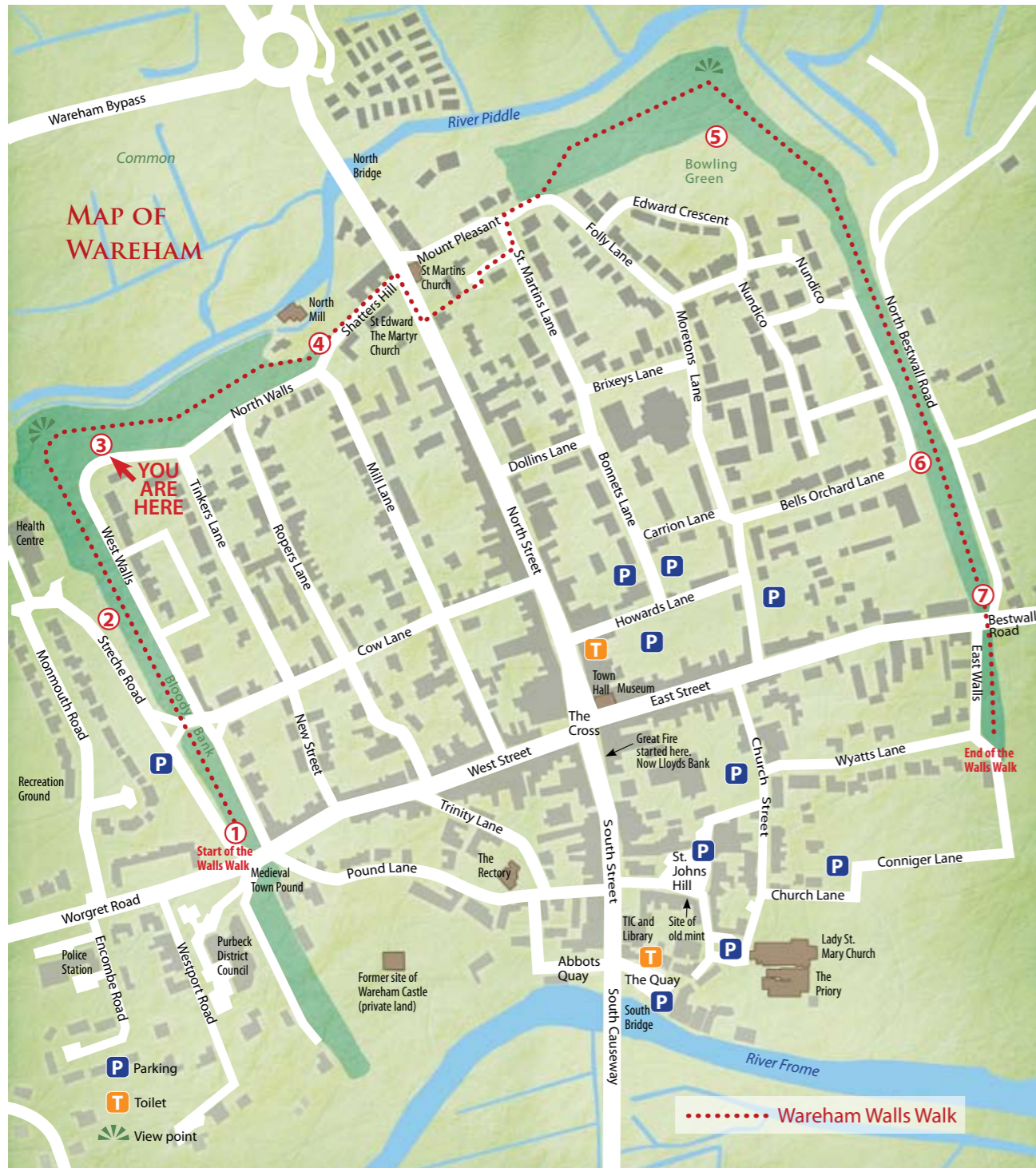


WAREHAM WALLS WALK ~ POINT 3, NORTH WALLS



WEST WALLS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Excavations on West Walls between 1952 and 1954 confirmed that the town defences developed and declined in three phases over 300 years. No work has been undertaken on either North or East Walls, but it is assumed that the construction there was similar.



Saxons constructing the "walls"

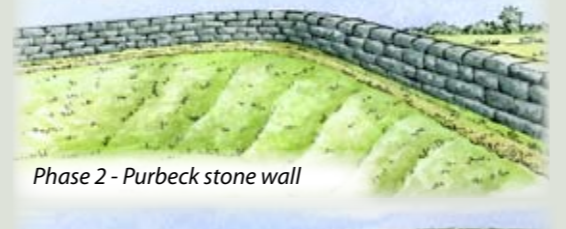
WALLS CONSTRUCTION PHASES

Phase 1 - Construction of a timber-faced rampart 14 metres wide and 3 metres high made up of soil and gravel thrown up from an external ditch which was 9 metres wide and 5 metres deep. These works probably date to the later 9th century. There were gateways on the north, west and east. The river crossing in the south (where south bridge is today) would have been vulnerable to attack.



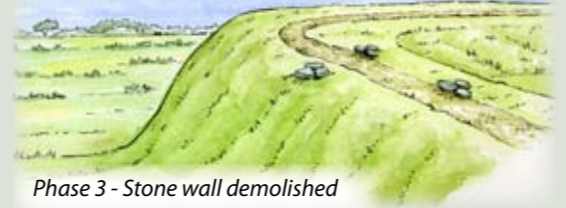
Phase 1 - timber-faced rampart

Phase 2 - The bank was widened and a wall built of large blocks of Purbeck stone was constructed on a mortared base set on the earthen rampart. Behind this was a wide footpath of clay and sand. These refurbishments date to the late 10th century and the reign of Ethelred the "Unready", when a further wave of Vikings under King Canute ravaged Dorset.



Phase 2 - Purbeck stone wall

Phase 3 - Robbing-out of the stone wall. This demolition occurred after 1066 when the stone wall was dismantled and the blocks were no doubt recycled for building works in the town. It is possible that some were used in the construction of the castle, where this nearby source of suitable stone could have been easily accessed. The change in military emphasis now involved guarding the king in a stronghold, rather than protecting his people in their town. The walls would never again retain their strategic importance.



Phase 3 - Stone wall demolished

THE VIKINGS IN WAREHAM

During AD 876, events played out at Wareham had far-reaching effects on the subsequent history of the entire country; they are documented in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. At that time, England was divided into four kingdoms; Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria.



In this year, the Viking army, about 2000 strong and mostly made up of young, fit men, marched from Cambridge, avoiding King Alfred's Wessex forces and entered Wareham. Alfred negotiated with the Vikings under their leader Prince Guthrum, to leave his kingdom. Hostages were exchanged and oaths taken but all to no avail. The peace treaty was broken, the hostages killed, and under the cover of darkness, the Vikings escaped from the town and made for Exeter.

After conquering Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, it is probable that the principal Viking aim was to kill Alfred, king of Wessex; if this had been achieved the whole country would then have been under Viking control. However the plan to do this at Wareham failed. It is likely that Alfred's forces surrounded the town and the besieged Vikings would have quickly run out of supplies. A night-time escape to another fortified, well-stocked Wessex town gave them breathing space to plan further sorties. Fifty years later, Alfred's grandson Athelstan united the four kingdoms into one country - 'England'.



Viking army arriving in Wareham AD 876

ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT

Down below this spectacular viewpoint across Wareham Meadows the Walls are bounded by a ditch connected to the River Piddle.

Photos from the 1880s show that North Walls supported grassland with fairly extensive areas of scrub, including gorse and some bare sandy patches. This part of the Walls would have been grazed historically but subsequently became invaded by scrub and trees. The trees not only hid the monument in views from the north, but damaged its structure with their roots.

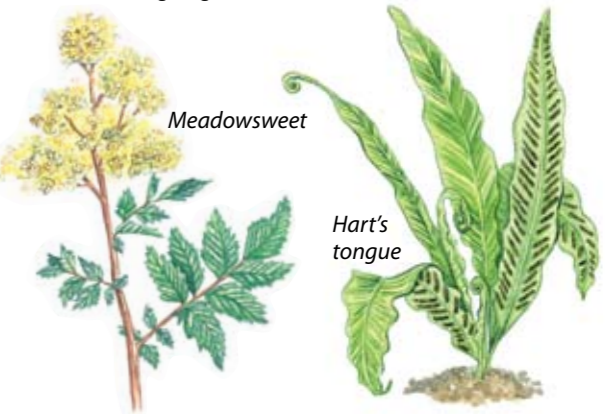


Gorse



Early photograph showing grazing on the Walls during the 1880s.

Recent extensive tree clearance has bought the North Walls back to a condition similar to when they were grazed. They can once again be clearly seen from the north of the town as the impressive defences they once were. Small pockets of woodland and scrub have been retained and provide cover for breeding birds. Meadowsweet, common valerian, and hart's tongue grow next to the ditch.



Meadowsweet

Hart's tongue

