

walk in the footsteps of shakespeare

A guided trail around Billesley, Wilmcote and Aston Cantlow.

HISTORIC CHURCH 



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

visitchurches.org.uk/shakespeare

Walk in the footsteps of Shakespeare

Canal towpaths, open countryside, ancient woodlands, cosy pubs and unusual churches. This trail links the villages of Wilmcote, Aston Cantlow, and Billesley - each claiming its own special connection to William Shakespeare.

There are two circular routes - a walking route mainly on public footpaths, and a road-based route for cyclists and those with limited mobility (though please be aware the country roads are often narrow and without pavements). Both routes are about 8 miles long, but can be explored in sections.

Below you will find more detailed maps of each section of the trail: Wilmcote to Billesley, Billesley to Aston Cantlow, and Aston Cantlow to Wilmcote

Places of interest that you may wish to visit have been highlighted. Opening times are seasonal - please check before you visit.

Getting here

Public transport:

Wilmcote train station is served by trains from Birmingham, Stratford-Upon-Avon and London. Buses run between Wilmcote, Aston Cantlow and Stratford-Upon-Avon.

Bike:

The long distance Route 5 of the National Cycle Network (between Reading and Holyhead) passes through the area.

Car:

The area lies north west of Stratford and is reached via the A46 (Stratford - Worcester).

There is free parking at:

- The Mary Arden Inn and Mary Arden's Farm, Wilmcote
- The Kings Head, Aston Cantlow
- Billesley Manor Hotel

Food & facilities

All three villages have places to stop, rest and eat: the Mary Arden Inn and the Mason's Arms, both in Wilmcote; The Kings Head, Aston Cantlow; and the Billesley Manor Hotel.

Mary Arden's Farm, Wilmcote, also has a cafe and picnic area.

The Wilmcote Store is a handy place (and the only one on the route!) to pick up supplies for the journey.

A note on the walking route

The terrain is relatively flat but uneven. There are some steep parts, which are slippery when wet (these are marked on the map). Please make sure you are appropriately equipped. Stout walking shoes or boots are recommended. The route is not suitable for people using wheelchairs or pushchairs.

The route takes you through open farmland and fields where livestock may be grazing. Please act accordingly and abide by the Countryside Code:

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

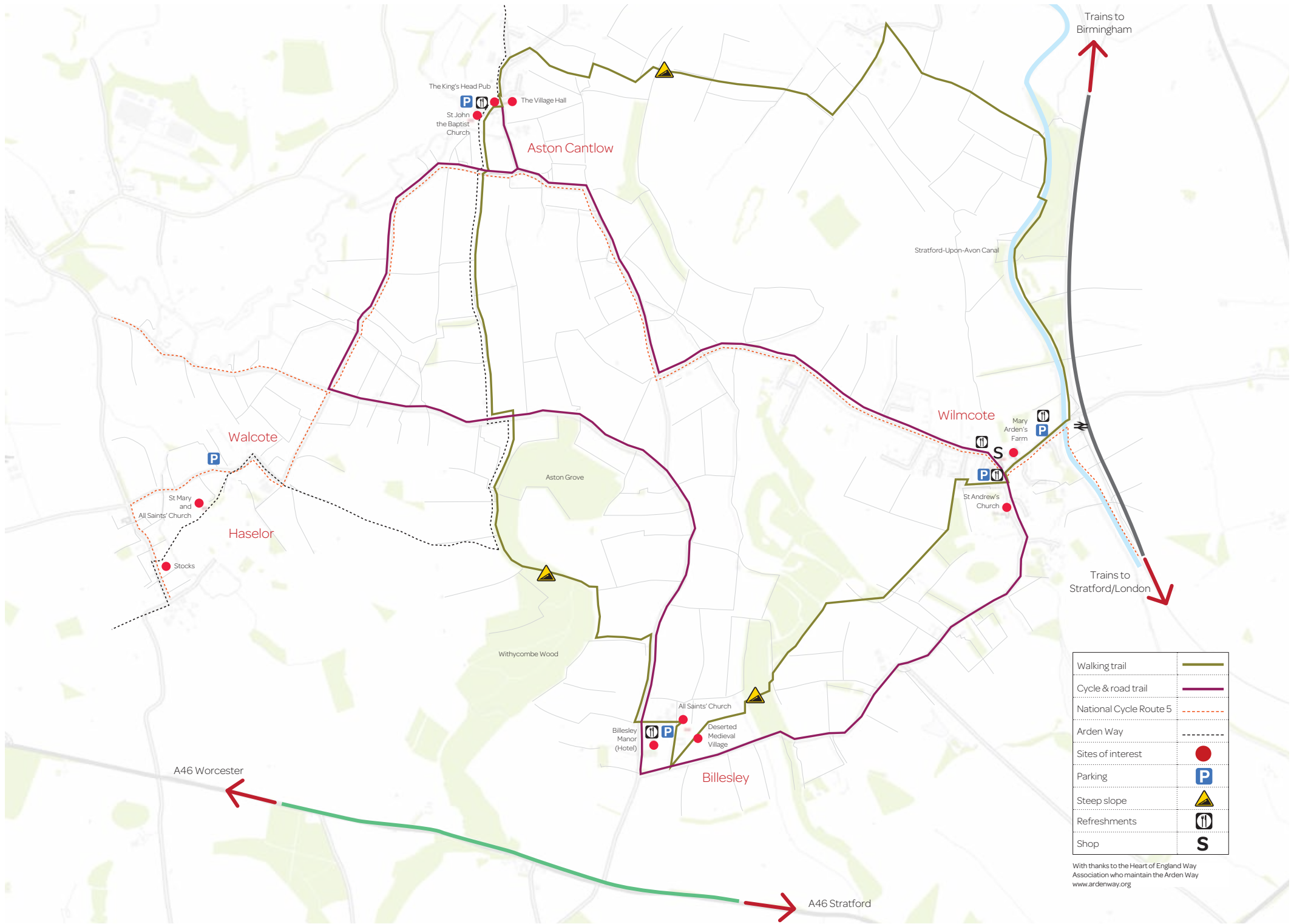
We recommend this trail be used in conjunction with the Ordnance Survey's Explorer maps (205 and 220) at 1:25 000 scale. These show alternative public paths as well as longer signed routes and other useful information.

The little church at the heart of the trail

Grade 1 Listed All Saints' Church was built in the 11th century to serve the village of Billesley. In the 14th century, Billesley suffered a run of bad harvests and plague epidemics. The church fell into disrepair, but was saved when remodelled in the 17th century to become the estate church of Billesley Manor.

In 1976, All Saints' future was secured when it passed into the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Assisted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and with support from local communities, the Trust is working to preserve the church, along with its links to one of England's most famous writers.

This pamphlet has been created in collaboration with the Aston Cantlow and District Local History Society. We hope you enjoy the trail.



Walking trail	
Cycle & road trail	
National Cycle Route 5	
Arden Way	
Sites of interest	
Parking	
Steep slope	
Refreshments	
Shop	

With thanks to the Heart of England Way Association who maintain the Arden Way
www.ardenway.org

Trail highlights: Aston Cantlow - Wilmcote (3.2 miles)

Leaving the village, you will find yourself wandering through wild meadows between vast fields of wheat, oats and grazing livestock. Many species of plants, wild animals and insects flourish here: you may be surprised by a deer bounding across the field in front of you; a host of butterflies wafting their way past; or the electric blue of the cornflower.

Part of the walking route follows the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. Completed in 1816, the canal became vitally important for transporting limestone and lime cement from the local quarries. Because it splits well, the stone was used for paving, as well as building. It was even used to pave the floors of the new Houses of Parliament in Westminster.



Stratford-upon-Avon Canal



St Andrew's Church

Built in 1841 to serve the growing population drawn to work in the quarry, its design by William Butterfield is admired as a pure specimen of the Gothic Revival.



Mary Arden's Farm

Once the home of Shakespeare's mother, now a living history museum and working farm.



Things to see in Billesley



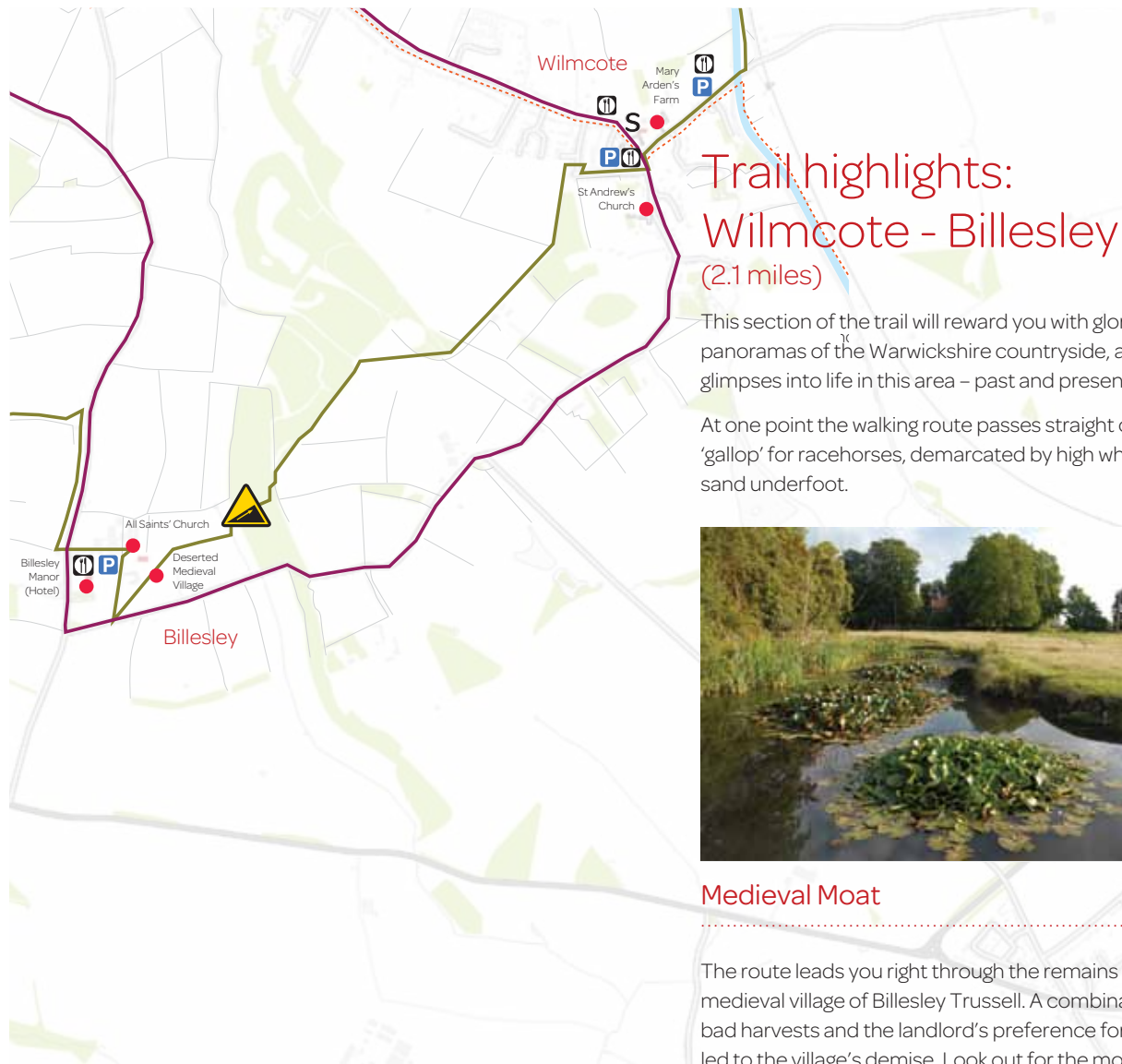
All Saints' Church

Dating from the 11th century, it is said that William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway here. Evidence indicates that this is where their granddaughter, Elizabeth, wed.



Billesley Manor

A new manor house was built in the 17th century. It is now a hotel.



Trail highlights: Wilmcote - Billesley (2.1 miles)

This section of the trail will reward you with glorious panoramas of the Warwickshire countryside, alongside glimpses into life in this area – past and present.

At one point the walking route passes straight over a training 'gallop' for racehorses, demarcated by high white fences, with sand underfoot.



Medieval Moat

The route leads you right through the remains of the deserted medieval village of Billesley Trussell. A combination of plague, bad harvests and the landlord's preference for sheep farming led to the village's demise. Look out for the moat that once surrounded the village's manor house.

Keep an eye out for the ornate Victorian bus shelter, transplanted here by a local landowner to be used as a hunters' refuge.

Trail highlights: Billesley - Aston Cantlow (3 miles)

The trail takes you through an area of ancient woodland, home to several protected species of trees and plants. It is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.



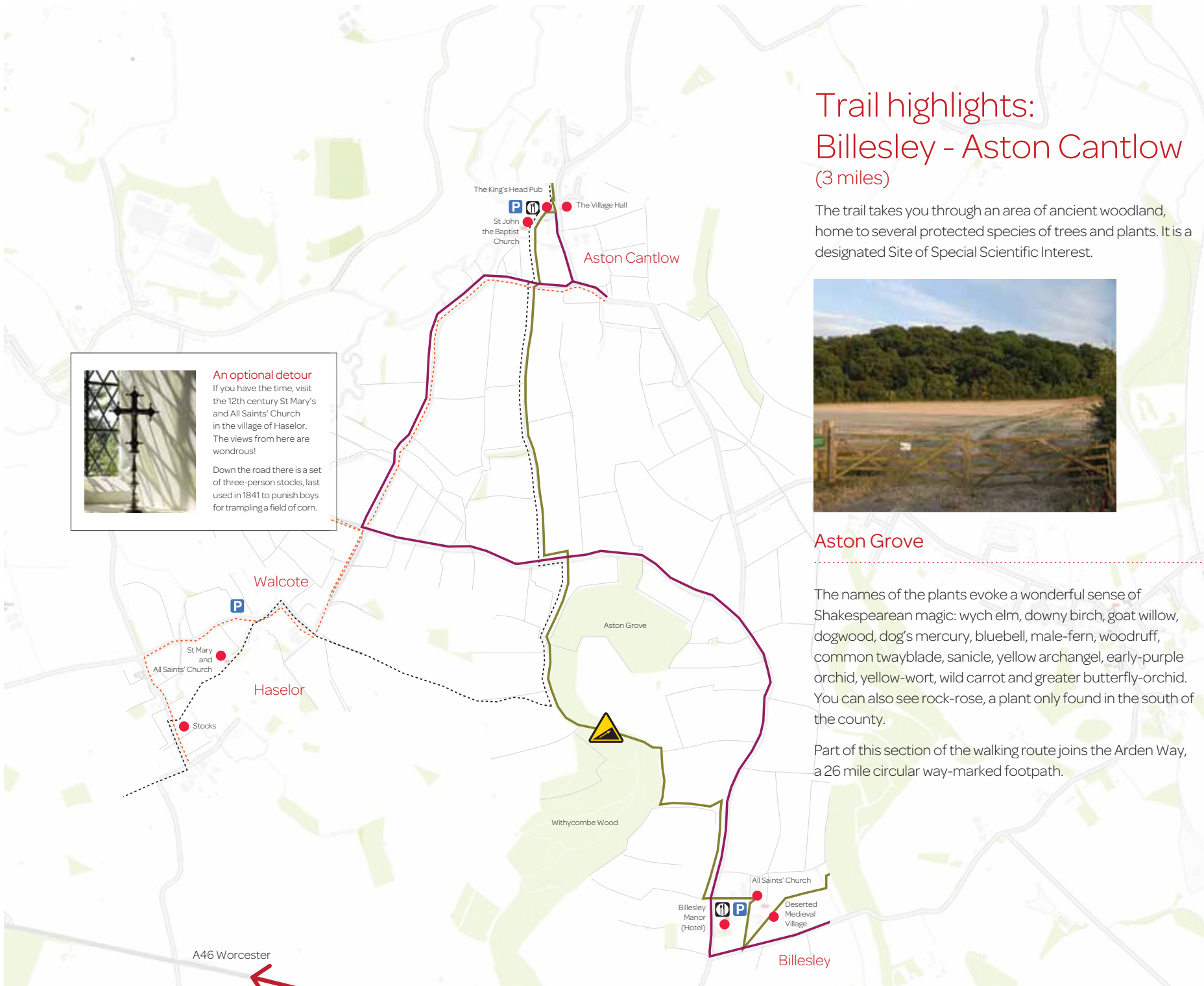
Aston Grove

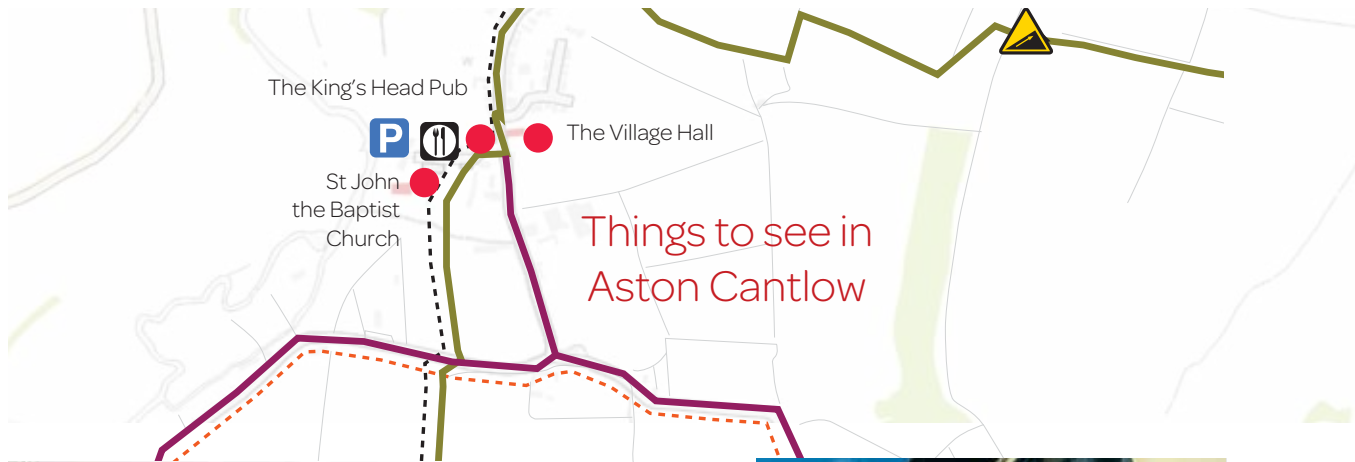
The names of the plants evoke a wonderful sense of Shakespearean magic: wych elm, downy birch, goat willow, dogwood, dog's mercury, bluebell, male-fern, woodruff, common twayblade, sanicle, yellow archangel, early-purple orchid, yellow-wort, wild carrot and greater butterfly-orchid. You can also see rock-rose, a plant only found in the south of the county.

Part of this section of the walking route joins the Arden Way, a 26 mile circular way-marked footpath.



An optional detour
If you have the time, visit the 12th century St Mary's and All Saints' Church in the village of Haselor. The views from here are wondrous!
Down the road there is a set of three-person stocks, last used in 1841 to punish boys for trampling a field of corn.





St John the Baptist Church

This 13th century parish church is where William Shakespeare's parents, Mary Arden and John Shakespeare, married in 1557.



The Village Hall

Formerly the medieval Guild Hall, it was once also used as the local jail.



The King's Head Pub

Reportedly where Shakespeare's parents celebrated their wedding.

The Churches Conservation Trust is the national charity protecting historic churches at risk.

We've saved over 340 beautiful buildings which attract more than 2 million visitors a year. With our help and with your support they are kept open and in use – living once again at the heart of their communities.



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