

Amidst this rural landscape, watched over by the circling red kites, it is hard to imagine that you are standing in one of the greatest medieval castles in England. We hope that this brief guide will bring the green mounds to life for you.

1 First get your bearings: directly ahead (south) is a piece of standing masonry that marks the approximate line of the inner wall of the castle. Behind it, capped by a group of large trees, is the huge motte (mound) – the heart of the late 11th century castle. In front of you the path crosses a deep ditch, once water-filled, which was first dug by Saxons in the 9th century as part of the defences of their town. To your right runs the rampart of the second castle wall on which you are standing.

Turn round to face north. Ahead is the ditch that was once the second moat. The crest of the next rampart carried the third wall of the castle and beyond lay the outermost moat. You should be able to make out an earthen outwork from the 17th century Civil War.

Now walk south across the Saxon ditch to the piece of masonry (Point 2)

2 This fragment may be the remains of a castle building. It stands on what was the edge of the inner bailey, the bustling central courtyard of the castle. The Norman motte dominates the courtyard: when capped by its original stone tower it must have been a formidable sight. Imagine the bustle and noise of medieval daily life here: the smells of the bakery, the shouts of men, the neighing of horses, and the hammering of armourers.

As you walk to Point 3, notice the line of the iron fence to your right. This roughly marks the original entrance to the castle, which cut through the 12th and 13th century outer fortifications, and was probably flanked by great towers.

3 Here the motte towers above you while the inner moat lies below. Beyond (now on the other side of Castle Lane with its fine brick walls) lies the middle bailey of the castle. This extension to the Norman castle was probably built for the Empress Matilda in the 12th century Civil War.

The surrounding ramparts were once capped with high stone walls. To the left, partly hidden by summer foliage, you can glimpse the stone remains of the College of St Nicholas, once guardian of the King's chapel in the castle.

A Victorian mansion was built in the middle bailey in 1837, with St Nicholas as its summerhouse. The house would have totally dominated the view until its demolition in 1972.

The castle moat below you remains wet most of the year. It would have been stocked with fish in the past to provide food for the castle garrison.

A few yards further on there is a fenced area to your right. Walk down the slope outside the fence to a small gate near the ditch. Go through the gate to Point 5.

5 It is likely that somewhere here the castle moats were originally controlled by sluices which could be emptied into the low-lying meadow area.

In the 1800's, the Victorians created this grotto, and planted the banks with various 'exotic' plants, including snowdrops, bluebells and cotoneaster. Frogs, herons, moorhens and wagtail are to be seen at times. The shallow edges, exposed mud and waterlogged wood are all good for invertebrates. Pond dipping here is fun, but the mud is very deep, so please take care and always keep children under supervision.

Emerg from the pond area through the other gate, and continue along the path to Point 6.

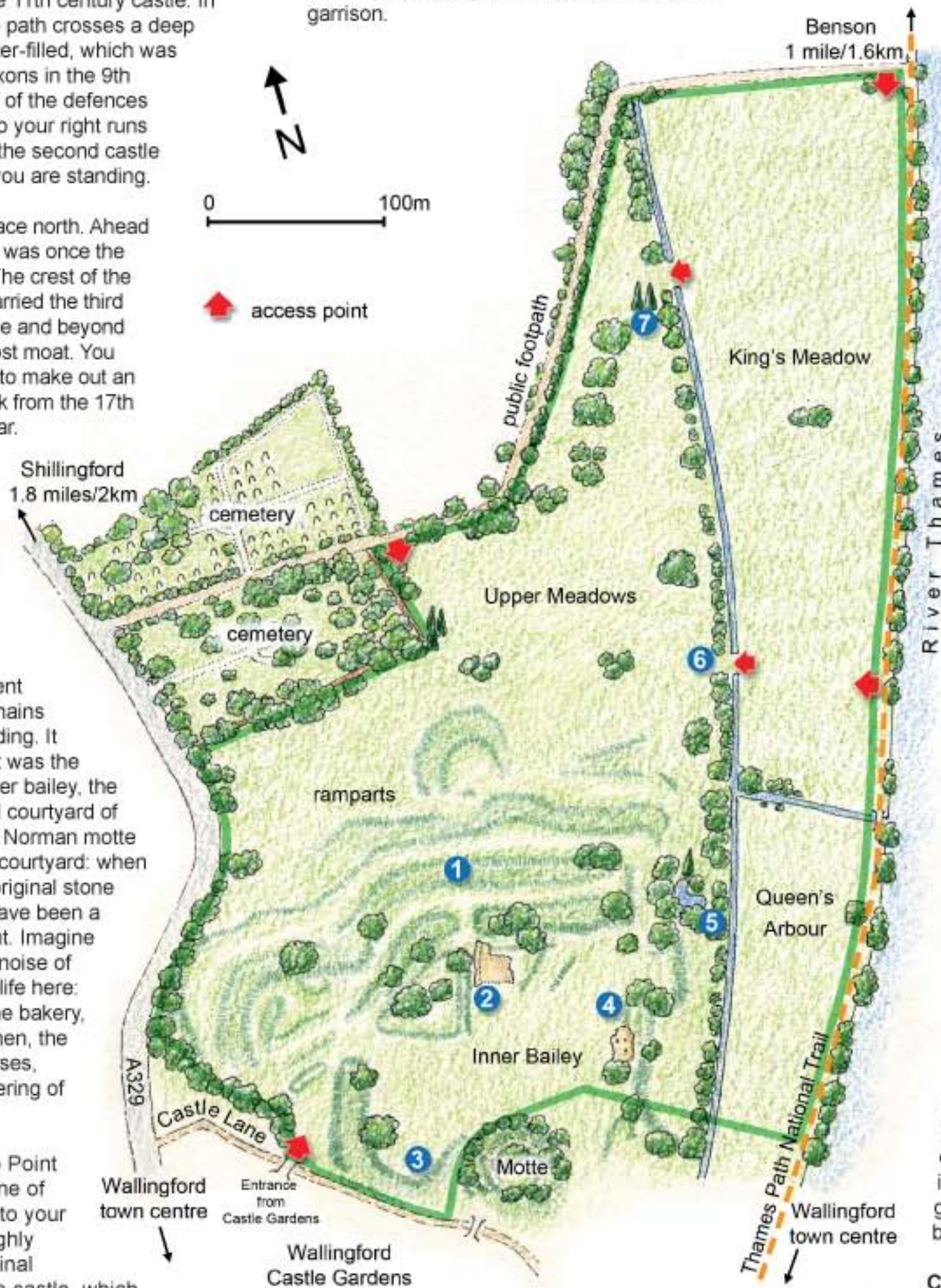
6 The water-meadows that divide the castle from the River Thames were essential for providing food for the castle's animals, and in later years, the burgesses of Wallingford had grazing rights for their cattle here.

The meadow-side ditches are managed to provide a suitable habitat for water voles, although they are rare today.

As you walk on to Point 7 along the path, you will see evidence of the tree management schemes. The variety of species and the character of the landscape are being preserved by planting new trees alongside mature ones. The strapping of dead trees to live ones is an experiment to provide good habitat for insects and birds alike.

Continue along the path to Point 7, observing the trees as you go.

7 The two sentry-like Wellingtonias mark the limit of our walk. Be sure to feel their spongy red bark. Lastly, look back at the castle. The buildings are long gone, torn down in 1652 by Oliver Cromwell, six years after the last great siege of the Civil War, but take a moment to imagine the outline of the great turreted walls, and the motte crowned by its massive tower – a formidable place indeed.



Walk to Point 4 by following the path along the base of the motte. The river will come into view ahead and the path will bear left to take you to Point 4.

4 The fragment of stonework in front of you is all that is left of the riverside wall of the castle. It retains a small section of dressed stone – once part of a window. Known locally as 'Queen's Tower', this stonework may have been part of the private apartments of the castle.