



Box Tunnel in 1930s

## Box Heritage Trail

This circular walk offers magnificent views of Box Valley in the Cotswolds National Landscape and details related to quarrying, milling, and Brunel's Great Western Railway (GWR).

The Trail starts at Box Rec car park and the Rock Circus is the first point of interest on Box Recreation Ground, the nearest bus stop is on the High Street. It is 4.5 miles long and has a total ascent of 537 feet allowing walkers to view the beautiful By Brook Valley from several viewpoints.

It includes parts of the village within the Box Conservation Area, an area of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Much of the walk follows public rights of way and footpaths. It is a moderate walk with some short, steep gradients or rough terrain and some stiles.

### Introduction

This walk seeks to explore the Box section of the By Brook valley, and to explain what features have caused Box to be part of the Cotswolds National Landscape, including its landscape, geology and heritage buildings.

To the north of the By Brook are the small farms which characterise the Cheese Area of North Wiltshire. To the south are some of the largest stone mines in the country with many miles of interconnecting passages.

Occupation in the village dates back to at least Roman times. Today Box is best known for its Brunel-designed Box Railway Tunnel.



### 1 The Rock Circus

The Rock Circus on Box Recreation Field (the Rec) demonstrates the evolution of the area and its geology. The outer edge of the circle represents the 4.6 billion years of Earth's history including the evolution of the first life on Earth, significant extinction events and the emergence of mankind.

The obelisk is made of Box Ground Jurassic limestone, a very durable and beautiful stone. It is constructed of 3 blocks of ashlar (a finely dressed, cut and worked, stone) from Hartham Quarry in Corsham. The history of stone quarrying in Box dates back to at least the construction of the nearby Roman Villa located in the vicinity of the church.

▶ *From the Rock Circus cross the boundary edge of the Rec. At lane turn left and under the railway bridge and walk past Box Mill to the public footpath on your right by the side of the By Brook.*



### 2 Box Mill

Box Mill may have been mentioned in the Domesday Book but has been greatly restored since. For centuries it was owned by the Pinchin family and has been used for milling corn, as a fulling mill in the cloth-making industry and for producing animal feedstuff. It ceased production after the Second World War and in 1987 was bought by Peter Gabriel who developed some of the site into a recording studio. The historic water courses that served the mill can still be seen near the public right of way, the Macmillan Way.

▶ *Follow the By Brook over footbridge, then left through gate into open fields along the By Brook.*

### 3 The By Brook

The By Brook is a tributary of the Bristol River Avon. Twenty watermills have been identified along the river, three in Box parish, but none now remain in use. The Box section of the brook had a number of uses, including flooding surrounding water meadows in the valley to encourage early grass for animal grazing.

The mills in Box were used for corn grinding and provided power required in the manufacture of cloth for fulling (beating with hammers).

▶ *Continue on the public footpath to its junction with the lane. Turn right down the lane and right again over the By Brook down to Drewetts Mill.*

### 4 Drewetts Mill

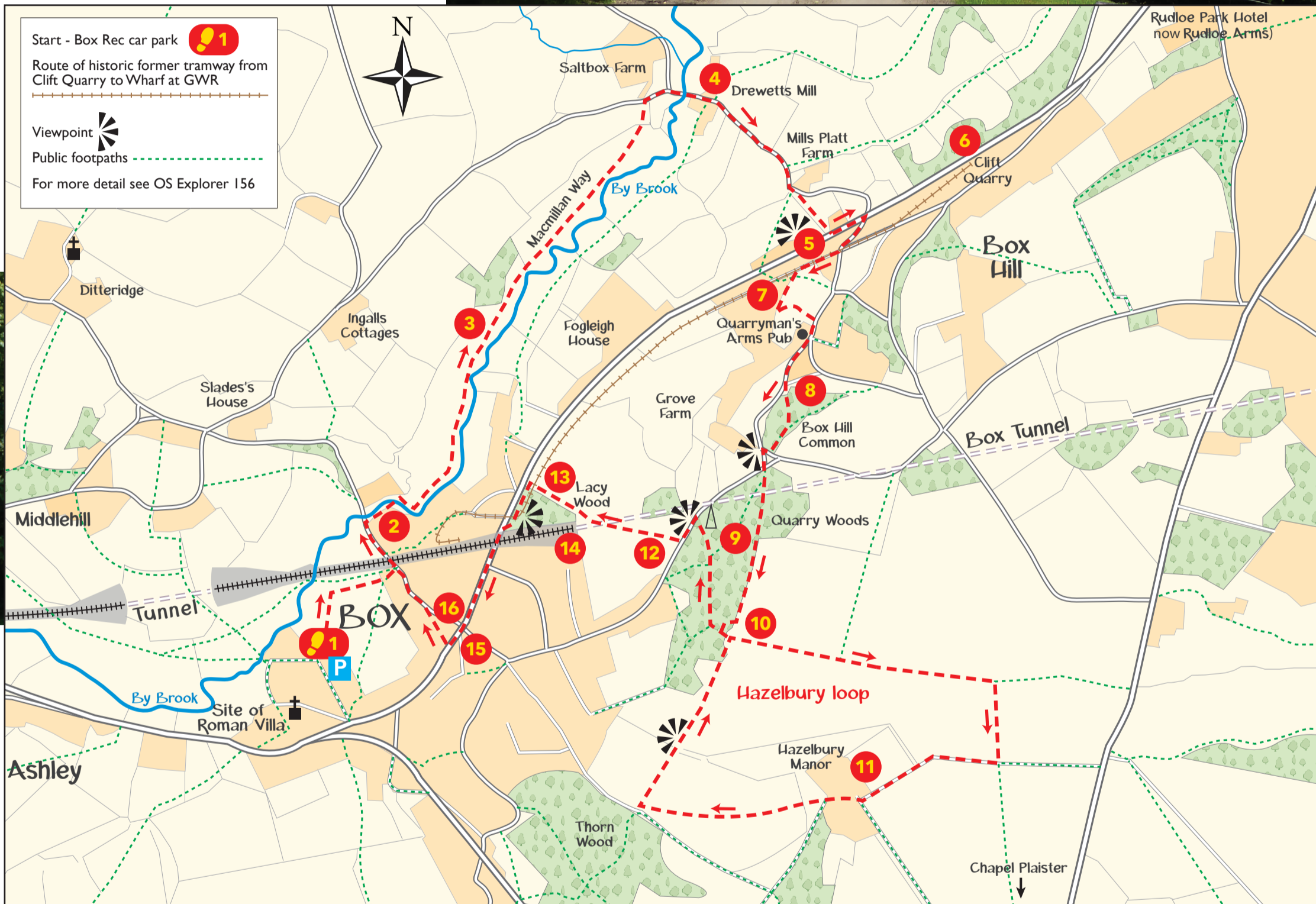
Drewetts Mill is a Grade II\* listed building, Mill Cottage and Mill House to the south are Grade II. The mill has some complete 19th century machinery. The buildings are constructed in traditional building materials including natural stone slate roofs, attractive features of historic buildings in the Cotswolds National Landscape. This is a fine group of historic buildings with watercourses that served the mill.

The mill was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 and it continued in use as a mill with the Tucker Family until the 1990s.

▶ *Walk up the steep lane to Millsplatt Farm on your left, a Grade II listed farmhouse with barn and cottages. The name of the area means the plot of land next to the mill. Follow a track up the steps and continue on the footpath up to the main road and the site of the former Rising Sun Public House.*



The Drewetts Mill buildings complex



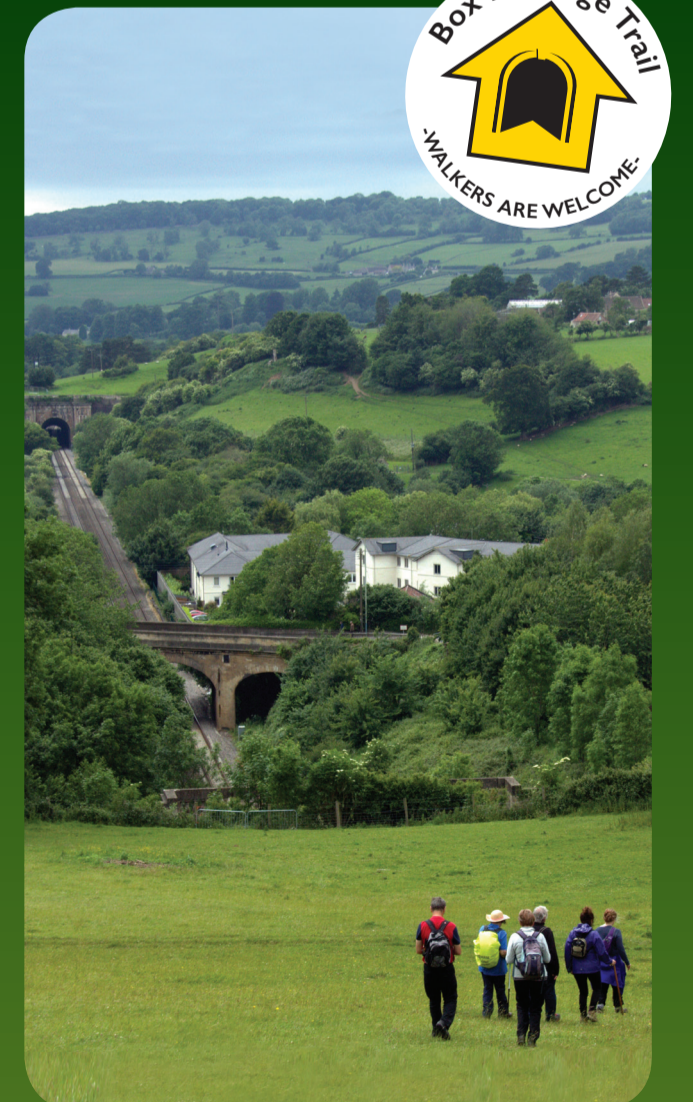
### 5 The Rising Sun

The road from Corsham to Box was built after 1761 and was the first direct route into the east of the village. The site of the former pub here, The Rising Sun, offers a magnificent viewpoint for the Box Valley which stretches below. In the late 1800s the area was a thriving hamlet called "Box Hill by the Road" with numerous quarrymen's cottages, shops, a Post Office, a Methodist Chapel and The Rising Sun. The pub was destroyed in a gas explosion on 4 December 1957, which tragically killed three occupants.

Further up Box Hill on the south side of the A4 was Cliff Quarry Works. The trail does not take you up to this site but due to its historic importance it is referred to in the following section of the leaflet.



# Box Heritage Trail



Circular 4.5 mile walk offering magnificent views of Box Valley in the Cotswolds National Landscape and details of quarrying, milling, and Brunel's Great Western Railway.

**The Countryside Code**

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any way signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Take only pictures and leave only footprints

### Box Community History

For further information, please see [www.boxpeopleandplaces.co.uk/](http://www.boxpeopleandplaces.co.uk/) following, to whom many thanks:

Box Parish Council  
The Bingham Trust Box  
Corsham Walking Festival  
Cotswolds National Landscape  
Wiltshire Council



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Designed by Bob Child: [www.pearrestudios.co.uk](http://www.pearrestudios.co.uk)

**Other Heritage Trails:**

- Biddestone Heritage Trail
- Corsham Heritage Trails
- Colerne Heritage Trail
- Peacock Heritage Trails

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### 6 Clift Quarry Works

These buildings were the workshops, offices, manager's house and outbuildings to Clift Quarry and lie near the underground quarry entrance. Horses hauled stone on wooden framed trolleys in the quarry on rails. A tramway took the stone down to The Wharf in Box for loading onto the GWR railway.

The Pictor family, notable Box stone quarry owners, started quarrying this site in 1865. A short distance away are the High Gothic buildings of Fogleigh House and Rudloe Park Hotel both Grade II listed properties, built for members of the Pictor family. In the underground quarry relics of the stone industry with beautifully engineered historic cranes and narrow-gauge rails on which the quarry trolleys once ran. Examples of quarrymen's graffiti can be found throughout the tunnels.



Quarrymen gathered outside Clift Quarry Works

### 7 "Stairway to Heaven" and the Quarryman's Public House

From the Rising Sun site continue a short way up to the next road junction and take care crossing the A4 up to Hedgesparrow Lane. Turn first right onto Beech Road, which follows the line of the tramway from Clift Quarry to the GWR. Walk down Beech Road and turn left onto the public bridleway and walk up as far as the steps on the left, sometimes called "Stairway to Heaven".

The steps take you up through an old surface quarry from Lower Box Hill Common to the Quarryman's Pub. There is a tradition that the beds of building stone were discovered after St Aldhelm (645 - 709), threw down his glove and said "dig and you will find great treasure". The quarries provided stone to abbey and local great houses and the historian John Aubrey wrote in the late 1600s: "The quarre at Hazelbury was the most eminent for freestone in the western parts before the discovery of the Portland quarrie".

At Quarryman's Arms turn right and continue across Box Hill Common.



### 8 Box Hill Hamlet and Box Common

An extensive hamlet developed near the Quarryman's Arms in the late 1800s to house the quarrymen close to the working quarries. Box Hill Common has been owned by Box Parish Council since 1978 when it was acquired for the benefit of parishioners from George Lacy of Grove Farm to ensure it was never developed. Before the area was levelled, there were quarry entrances and spoil heaps on Box Hill Lower and Upper Common. Nearby was the underground chamber, the "Cathedral", 60 feet high and an estimated 200 feet long and 25 feet wide.

Walk across Box Common to where it slopes down to Quarry Hill where there are fine views from the Common across the By Brook valley towards Bath. Go straight across with care and enter Quarry Woods at the bridleway/footpath sign. Continue into the woods on the bridleway on your left.



Box Hill Common reclaimed from quarry spoil



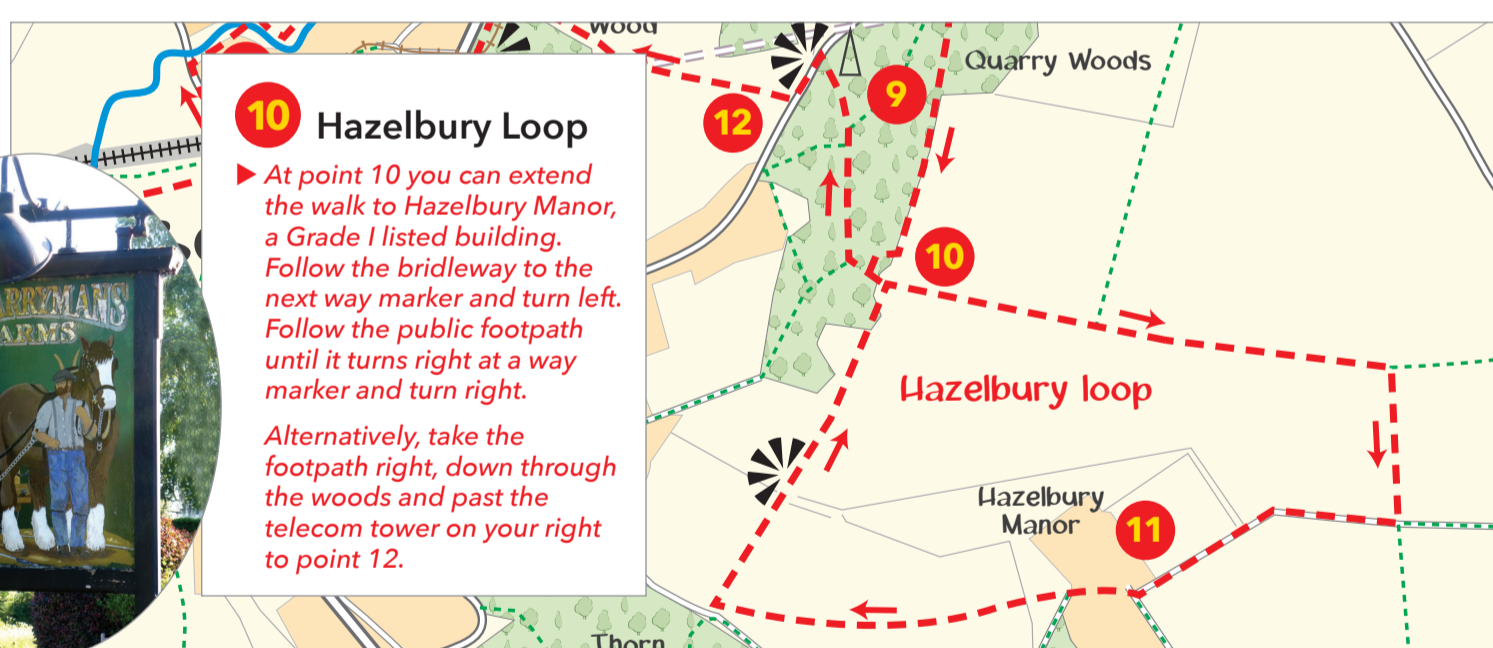
### 9 Quarry Hill Woods

Quarry Hill Woods is the site of old quarry entrance shafts which collapsed leaving deep scars in the landscape. The area is now partly taken over by beech woods. The Ordnance Survey map of 1900 describes the area as "Old Quarries". From the western end of the woods (point 12) is a splendid view of the entire Box Valley flanked by the high ridge at Colerne.

### 10 Hazelbury Loop

At point 10 you can extend the walk to Hazelbury Manor, a Grade I listed building. Follow the bridleway to the next way marker and turn left. Follow the public footpath until it turns right at a way marker and turn right.

Alternatively, take the footpath right, down through the woods and past the telecom tower on your right to point 12.



### 11 Hazelbury Manor and Gardens

These are now a Grade II registered Historic Park and Garden. Please stay on the public footpaths as the house and garden are not open to the public.

The manor house was re-built by John Bonham after the Dissolution of the Monasteries and restored by George Jardine Kidston in the 1920s. It was visited by Queen Elizabeth I in 1575 and by Queen Mary, the then Queen Mother, in World War 2. At the top of the drive is the old coaching road between Chippenham and Bath where the historic Chapel Plaister, a Grade I listed building, is located.

After you complete the loop, you will be back at point 10 where you take the public footpath right through the woods onto Quarry Hill passing a tall telecom mast tower on your right. Walk down Quarry Hill road, then turn right at gate.



### 12 Box Fields

A superb view of the By Brook valley greets you. The trail passes downhill through medieval open fields to bottom right-hand corner where there are half-hidden remains of a World War 2 pillbox built to defend Box Tunnel.

Turn right through gate, bear left and downhill.



### 13 Lacy Wood

Turn left over stile into woods.

This area was donated to the village by George Lacy and planted to commemorate the millennium. There is a stone sculpture here dedicated to quarrymen. The route of the tramway from Clift Quarry once passed through this site.

Walk straight-on through the woods and out onto the main road at the specially-built viewing platform to the western portal of Box Tunnel (point 14).



The medieval Chapel Plaister is Grade I listed



View from Quarry Hill towards Colerne

### 14 Box Tunnel

The western portal of Box Tunnel is a Grade II\* listed building designed in Classical style by I.K. Brunel, the 19th century British engineer. The GWR is the most complete early main line railway in the world. The railway tunnel opened in 1841 and led to the discovery of extensive beds of fine stone under Box Hill, resulting in greatly-increased extraction and distribution.

After viewing the tunnel portal take care crossing the main road and turn left onto the railway bridge, listed Grade II. To the right in the distance lies the east portal of Middle Hill Tunnel, Grade II\*.

Looking down to the right from the bridge is the site of the Wharf Stoneyard, a siding for the tramway track that ran downhill by gravity from Clift Quarry. The stone was dressed here before being loaded onto railway trucks in the siding, in the same way as that at Box Station yard.

Continue down A4 London Road. The house on your right was once occupied by the Reverend Wilbert Vere Awdry, author of "Thomas the Tank Engine" stories.

Carefully cross Mill Lane near the Post Office and stop where you can see the Market Place opposite.



### 15 Market Place

The A4 was built to avoid the undulations in the old road through the Market Place. The original level can still be seen at the Old Dairy, once the residence of the manager of Box Brewery owned by the Pinchin family.

Continue past the terrace and turn right onto the footpath which takes you down by Fairmead View Terrace.

### 16 Quarrymen's Cottages

The cottages at Fairmead View were built by the Bath and Portland Stone Firms for rent by quarrymen. They are one of three terraces built for quarry workers in the area around Mill Lane and are strangely numbered 17 to 26.

Most of the tenants in the terraces facing the main road and at the bottom of Mill Lane were noted in the 1901 census as connected with the quarry trade and included a wagon maker, blacksmith, freestone sawyers, free stone chopper and stone masons.

Attractive original painted timber panelled doors still appear to survive on some of the terraced properties. Some also have interesting door furniture such as bat motif on the letterbox.

From here you find your route back via Mill Lane to Box Rec and the main car park.



Fairmead View from the Rec