

Benger Trails

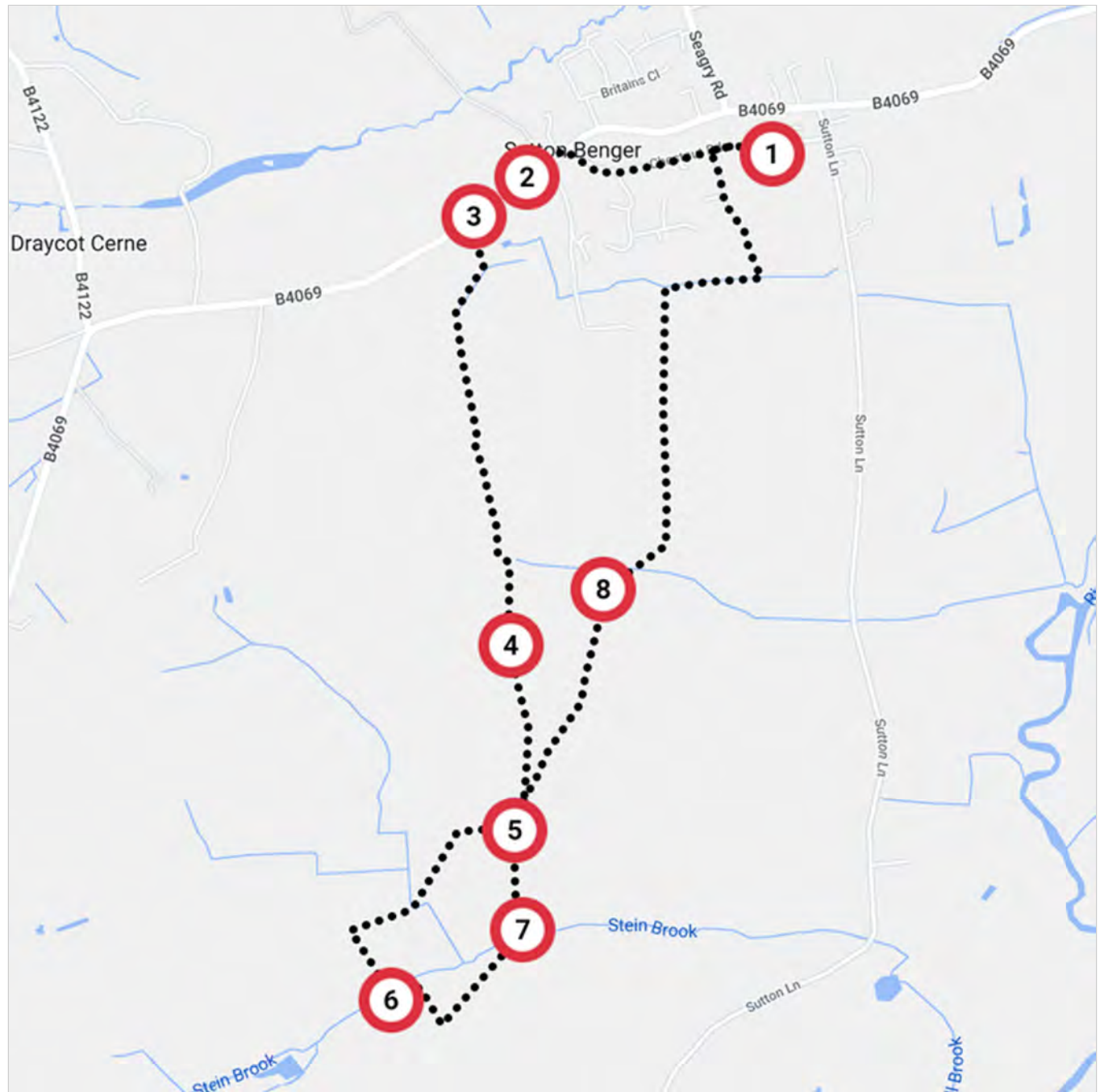
To Chissell Brook and Sutton Lane Meadows



This is a circular cross-country walk from the Village Hall, to Gate Farm and then to Chissell Brook, and back via Sutton Lane Meadows to the Village Hall.

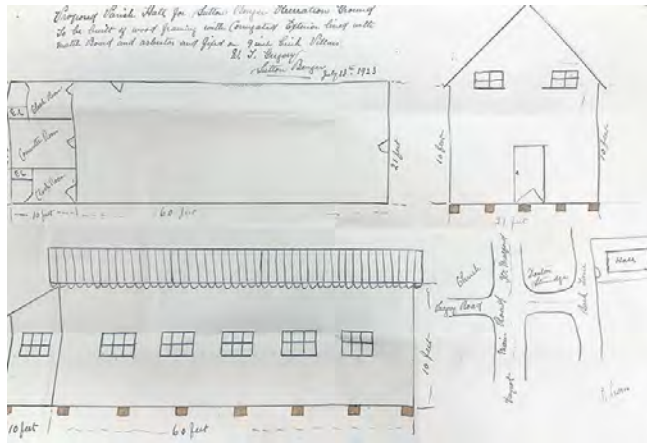
Trail Length 3.2 miles

Duration 60-90 minutes



Map Courtesy of Google Maps

1. Village Hall and Recreational Ground



Sutton Benger's Old Village Hall used to be where the car park is today. The New Village Hall was opened in 2000 after a major fund-raising effort.

The image shows the original hand drawn plan used to build the old Village Hall in 1923. Note the reference to 'Doctor Sturridge'. The doctor's surgery used to be in the Bell House, from the 1840s for about 100 years. You can still see where the entrance to the surgery used to be, in the brickwork on Bellside.

Recreation Ground



Before 1920, there was no Hall and no Recreation Ground. There used to be an orchard where the Bell Piece houses are. There was a kitchen garden next to the orchard. It belonged to the Bell House, home of the village doctor. This is where the doctor's surgery is today.

In March 1920 there was a big Auction of the entire Draycot Estate. Eight acres of land from Queen's Field was donated for a recreation ground.

The photograph shows a carnival on the Recreation Ground, probably in the 1930s.

Old Village Hall



After a fund-raising effort by the local villagers a Village Hall was opened in November 1923 by Lady Cowley. It only took Mr Gregory, the Sutton Benger wheelwright and carpenter, 3 months to build, with volunteer help, at a cost of just £300.

New Village Hall



Throughout the years the Village Hall was well-used but by the 1990s the Old Village Hall was not big enough for the needs of the village. The New Hall was built in 2000 at a cost of over £250,000 as a 'Millennium Project' after a major fund-raising project in 1997-1999 by a small group of villagers.

The New Village Hall was formally opened by local MP, James Gray, on 28 October 2000.

World War II



Sutton Benger Village Hall has been used for many functions and events over the years. The photograph shows one of the many functions that was held for the local community in the village hall just before and during the Second World War.

Back Lane - Chestnut Road



Sutton Benger has a village layout which is typical of many medieval villages: a High Street with a parallel Back Lane (now Chestnut Road) and a crossroads beside the 13th century Parish Church. The open area around the central crossroads used to be much bigger, forming a sort of 'village square'. The Tithe Map of the village from 1839/1840 also shows that Back Lane did not quite join up with the High Street originally.

Chestnut Road was still known as Back Lane in the 1950s, when it was still a natural-surface lane. It was re-named in the 1960s when new houses were being built on the south side of the village. This re-naming became official on 12 January 1967.

Barringtons' Taxis and Petrol Station



Dee's Garage – High Street – Sutton Benger

Most of the older houses on the south side of the High Street used to have gardens which extended all the way to Back Lane / Chestnut Road. There were very few houses along Back Lane until 50 years ago.

In the 1920s there used to be a taxi firm run by the Barrington family, roughly where No 11 Chestnut Road (The Stone House) is now. There was also a petrol station / garage on the corner of Chestnut Road / High Street, where Chestnut Grove is now.

Next On The Trail

Leave the Village Hall and walk past the school, along Chestnut Road to the high street; carefully cross the main road and continue walking to the Wellesley Arms.

2. The Wellesley Arms



The Wellesley Arms public house was built in the late 18th century. It was originally a coaching inn, like the Bell Inn at the far end of

the village. At the beginning of the 1800s, more than 200 years ago, it was called the Tylney Arms Inn. At that time the Lords of the Draycot Manor were the Tylney Long family. They married into the Wellesley family in 1812, and in the 1840s the pub name changed to the Wellesley Arms. It has kept the same name ever since, even though the Lord of the Manor became Lord Cowley in 1863.

The black and white postcard captioned 'JJ Hunt Calne', with people standing in front of The Wellesley, dates from 1904-1910; the landlady at this time was Mrs Louisa Sharp, who continued running it after it was bought by Wadworths following the 1920 Auction. With acknowledgements to JJHuntArchive for allowing us to use this photograph; see <https://jjhuntarchive.weebly.com> and also *JJ Hunt's Wiltshire Camera: One Hundred Historic Photographs of Marlborough and District*

Standing in the doorway of the pub in one of the photos from the 1930s are (left) Oliver Heath, the Park Lane Baker, and (right) Graham Olds, the butcher. They are taking a break from the fancy dress parade at one of the village carnivals.

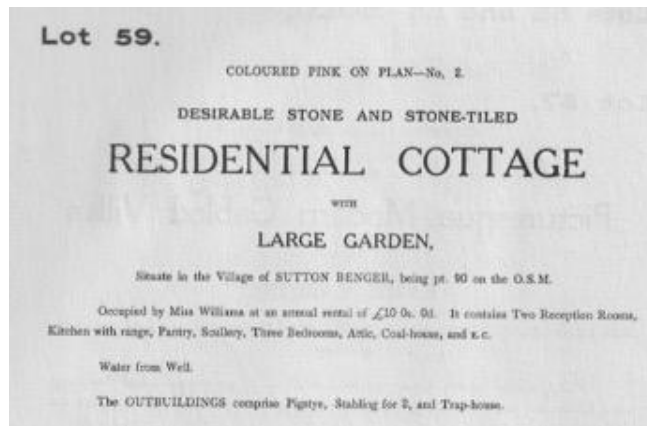
Across the road from The Wellesley, 100 years ago, there were two other farms in the village. Straight across the road was Arms Farm, named

after the pub, and further along the road towards Draycot Cerne is Gate Farm.

Can you help? Can you date the photos from the cars parked outside? Or do you have any other old photos of The Wellesley Arms that you would be happy to share? If so, please get in touch at:

Hello@bengertrails.co.uk

8 High Street



8 High Street, Rose Cottage, is a Grade II Listed Building. It was built in 1782, probably for Edward Russ. The date is shown in a crest over the front door, hidden by the ivy - it can be seen in the black & white photograph from the early 1900s

It was Lot No. 59 in the Draycot Sale in 1920.

6 High Street - Appletrees





The house now known as 'Appletrees', at 6 High Street, Sutton Benger, is a Grade II Listed Building; it was built in the mid-1860s. From the 1940s to the early 2020s it was the home of the Gardeners, who owned French Gardens, behind the house.

This house replaced one on the same plot, but which was closer to the road; it is shown on the 1808 and 1840 maps. (It is at #55 on the 1840 map). The house was occupied in 1808 by William Collins, and in 1840 by his son Isaac Collins; they were described as 'nurserymen'. The occupant of the new house in the 1870s was Thomas H Green, a 'Gardener', who lived at a 'House, Garden and Nursery'. It seems likely that the occupants of this house have always had some connection to the Draycot Estate gardens and nursery.

The 1920 Sale Catalogue describes the property as follows: 'Charming Residential Cottage in Chalet Style. With extensive walled-

in gardens, well stocked with fruit trees.' After the house and land was sold it was bought by Henry Harris, Nurseryman, who ran it as a commercial nursery, with a retail shop in Chippenham in the 1920s and 1930s.

2-4 High Street - Box Cottages



In the early 1800s there was only one house at the location of Box Cottages; it was known as 'Box Bush' and also as 'the cottage near Spencers'. The attached 1808 map shows the western end of Sutton Benger - note that East

is at the top with North to the left. #215 is The Wellesley Arms (then known as The Tylney Arms), and #218/219 are at the corner of French Gardens Lane. Box Bush is at #211, and the house at #213 was demolished to make way for Appletrees - which also took the empty plot at #212.

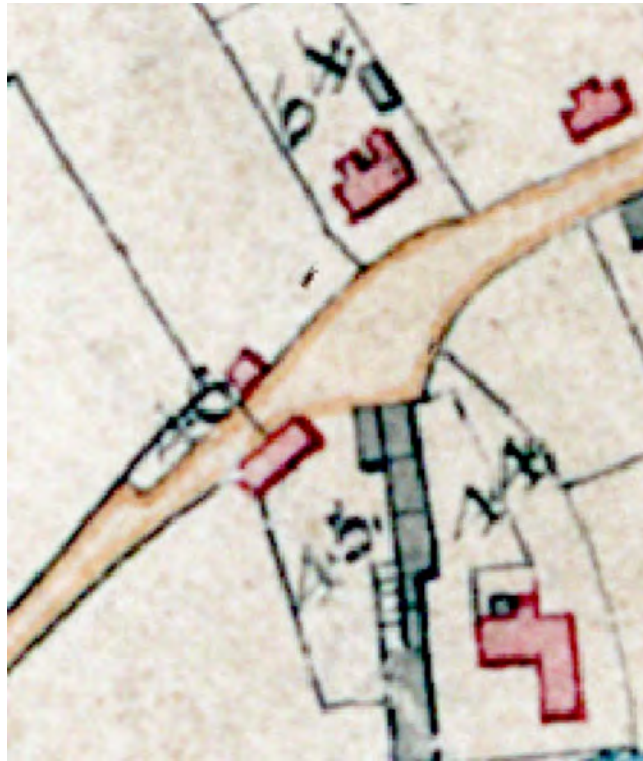
William Messiter, who died in 1800, was a painter and decorator, and rented several properties in the village. His son William Messiter (1771 – 1835), also a painter, was tenant of the cottage 'near Spencers' (aka 2/4 High Street); but then sub-let it to John Reeks of Dauntsey in March 1811.

It is possible to trace the house through various tenants and sub-tenants over the next 50 years, as the house becomes more commonly known as 'Box Bush'. But the property reverted to the Lord of Manor in 1835 when William Messiter died.

In 1851 the only occupant was Frances Hunt, aged 85, a widow. But there are two families living there in 1861: John Withers and Mrs Anne Miles. A set of leases from 1862 shows that they were each renting 'a House & Garden on the site of Box Cottage.' It therefore seems that the old 'Box Bush' house had been

demolished to make way for a new pair of Estate Cottages at some time between 1851 and 1861.

The Toll House



Gate Farm, Gate Court and Gate Cottage get their names from the fact that there was a Toll Gate to the west of the village during the 1800s, when the High Street was part of a Turnpike road from Bristol to Oxford. Throughout that time there was a small Toll House on the north side of the road. The house, in the field immediately west of 2-4 High Street (Box Cottages), was demolished in the 1880s when the Turnpike system ended.

The toll gate can be seen on the 1839 map as a line across the road between #45 (now Gate Cottage) and #46 (the Toll House).

Next On The Trail

From the Wellesley Arms, continue walking along the pavement until you are opposite Gate Court and The Shearings, the new houses that have been built on the south side of the road. Carefully cross the road to the right of Gate Cottage, where you see a 'footpath sign' pointing to the south.

3. Gate Cottage and the Green Road





from Gate Farm. The black and white photo shows Gate Farm in 1920, when it was sold in the Draycot Estate auction.

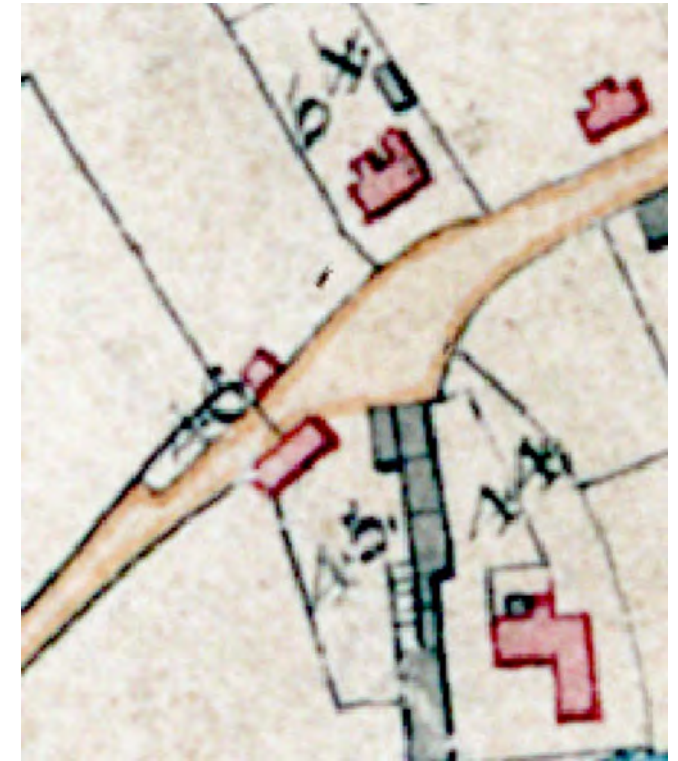
The 'green road' from here fell out of favour and was never given a hard surface, possibly because it takes a few dog-legs around field boundaries, and because it can also get quite muddy after rain. However, the route is still well-marked all along this walk. It starts between Gate Court and the new houses at The Shearings.

The Toll House



Gate Cottage is a Grade II listed building, dating back to the 1700s. Although it was probably two dwellings originally, during much of the 1800s it was the village draper's shop and family home. In 1861 the draper was Charles Pomroy, and living here with him were his wife, 2 daughters, a shop assistant, two apprentices and a servant. Charles moved his shop to Sutton House in the centre of the village and was replaced here by George West, a tailor.

In the 1700s there were two natural surface 'green roads' heading south of the village to Langley Burrell, leading to Chippenham. Sutton Lane, in the east of the village, eventually became the preferred road and was given a proper surface. The route you are now following was the alternative, leading south



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The toll gate can be seen on the 1839 map as a line across the road between #45 (now Gate Cottage) and #46 (the Toll House).

Gate Farm



In the 1700s and early 1800s Gate Farm and Arms Farm were two small unnamed farms, but were farmed together from about 1830. The farm was called Sutton Farm and the farmer in 1840 was John Lea. It was not until about 1880 that they were split up again, and the farm here became known as Gate Farm.

Next On The Trail

From Gate Cottage walk towards The Shearings, and then turn left when you see a yellow 'Public Footpath' sign.

From here it is a slight uphill stroll along the old bridgeway, often with horses in the field on your left. Keep following the signs / arrows as you continue slightly uphill. Stay to the right of the hedge, with the solar farm in the next field over to the right.

The parish of Draycot Cerne used to be separate from the parish of Sutton Benger, but they were combined in 1934. The old parish boundary paralleled this bridgeway, along the hedgerows to your right. The solar farm that you can see has been built on land that is part of Lake Farm, in Draycot Cerne.

You will eventually reach a small barn just before a small wood.

4. The Small Barn at Bull's Elms Wood





Follow the footpath, keeping the hedge on your left, heading towards the small barn in front of some trees. There is a small red arrow / route marker on the right of the barn.

The woodland behind the barn has been known as Bull's Elms Wood for at least 150 years. However, in 1839 it was known as Thornhill, and the wooded area was much smaller. The field names in the 1839 Tithe Schedule were often descriptive of the type of land; for example, several of the fields had 'clay' in their names, such as Great Clay, Small Clay and Clay Furlong.

Bull's Elms woodland has bluebells in it in April / May which you can see from the track. But note that it is not a public woodland.

The photos show a sequence from here to the next point on the trail.

Next On The Trail

Just behind the barn there is a gap in the fence / hedge on the left. Dog-leg through the gap to put the fence / hedge on your right, and continue uphill with the woods on your right.

At the top of the hill you pass the electric pylon and go under the wires. This is literally the high point of the walk. To your left you can see three farms on Sutton Lane. The one on the left (with Melsome Wood and Bradenstoke hill behind it) is the chicken farm by the bridleway to Avon Weir. The one in the middle is Meadow Farm, and the one to the right is Sutton Lane Farm.

Follow the old road down the hill.

As you approach a stile ahead of you, notice another stile on your left. Ignore that one on the left for now, but you will be crossing it on your way back. When you reach the stile ahead of you, do not cross that one either! You will be following the bridleway as it turns sharp right between two hedgerows. But you have reached the 'Road to Kington Langley'.

(However, if you want to shorten the route, you could cross that stile on your left, and turn hard left to head back uphill towards Sutton Lane Meadows. On the App, click Chissell Brook 2' and 'Next on the Trail' to see the directions.)

5. The Road to Kington Langley





People from Kington Langley and Langley Burrell used to use this route to travel to and from Avon Mill, the closest mill to their villages. The attached copy of the 1773 map of Kington Langley shows the houses around Great House, at the road junction on the main Chippenham - Sutton Benger road, shortly after the 'new road' (the 'Draycot Straight') had been built. Note that 'from Avon Mill' is upside down because this map was drawn with West at the top.

Turn right to follow the track as it becomes a narrow lane between two hedgerows. It can be quite boggy here after rain. (OK. It can be very muddy - sometimes ankle deep after rain. The reason why Sutton Lane became a paved road and this 'green lane' remained as footpaths and bridleways.)

On the other hand it can also be quite pretty with woodland flowers. And there can be quite a lot of fruit on the hedges in the autumn.

The photos also show a sequence from here to the next point on the trail.

This is a good old-fashioned road junction, and you need to turn right towards Kington Langley.

Avon Mill



3 Avon Mill Radial Gate

Purpose

The gate is one of many structures on the Upper Avon constructed for land drainage and water level control purposes. It is located at the village of Langley Burrell, in Wiltshire. It does not provide any flood risk management benefit; although if the gate failed in the closed position it could flood surrounding farm land.



Photo 4 – Avon Mill Radial Gate

Description

The asset at Avon Mill consists of a 9.1m span automatic radial gate. The structures of Avon Mill Radial Gate and Avon Weir Radial Gate are very similar.

National Grid Reference: S034877002
Local Authority: Wiltshire LDC

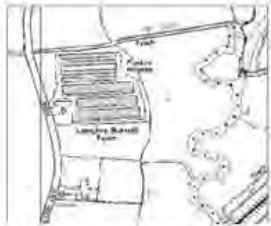


Figure 2 – Avon Mill Radial Gate Location

The construction drawings indicate that the structure was built around 1936 and then updated in 1955. A full mechanical refurbishment of the existing radial gate, replacing corroded elements where required, grit blasting and adding telemetry was carried out in 1995.

The 1840 map shows Avon Mill on the eastern (Christian Malford) side of what is now the weir. The image also shows the 'crossroads' on Sutton Lane, where the bridleway goes west to today's Sutton Lane Meadows, and east to the weir and Christian Malford.

Not shown on this image, just to the east, the map shows the proposed line of the Great Western Railway, which was built a few years later.

The 1885 map shows Avon Mill still in operation, with a house to the east of the Mill, and south of the bridleway.

The mill was demolished sometime in the early 1900s, and the weir was rebuilt in about 1935.

The attached notes were provided by the Environment Agency in 2023.

Next On The Trail

Go along the (occasionally muddy) bridleway between two hedges. Go through the gate at the end and then head diagonally across the middle of the field. Go across a small grass-covered bridge over a tiny stream and turn right along another track between hedgerows and trees. You are now following the boundary line between Sutton Benger parish (on your left) and Kington Langley (on your right).

When you reach an open field at the end, you will see the back of Great House, Kington Langley, about a mile ahead of you and slightly to the right (left of the pylon).

Do not go straight across the field. That direction would take you along the bridleway that leads to Kington Langley, reaching the main road by Great House.

Turn left along another section of the track between hedgerows. Cross the substantial wooden bridge over the stream and turn immediately left. You have reached Chissell Brook, the parish boundary.

6. Chissell Brook 1



This stream, Chissell Brook, has been the southern boundary of Sutton Benger parish for over 1000 years. It flows from the west to cross under Sutton Lane at the bridge just south of Sutton Lane Farm, and then goes on to join the River Avon at Kellaways.

To the west, where the stream flows through Kington Langley parish, it is known as the Stein Brook, and gives its name to Steinbrook House by the B4069. It then changes name at the parish boundary.

To the east, after going under Sutton Lane, Chissell Brook (and the parish boundary) meanders south for a while, roughly parallel to the River Avon. The brook and river create a flood plain that is crossed by the Great Western railway line on the River Avon Viaduct, which is a Historic England Grade II Listed Building.

Note that, while it is possible to get relatively close to the Viaduct by foot, there is no Public Right of Way that leads close enough to take meaningful photographs. See attached for full details of the Historic England Listing.

From here, there is a short loop through the parish of Langley Burrell Without, before returning to Chissell Brook a few hundred yards to the east. The attached photos are a sequence showing the route from here.

For more information about Langley Burrell, and for other walks, see <http://langleyburrell.org>.

Chissell Brook 1840s



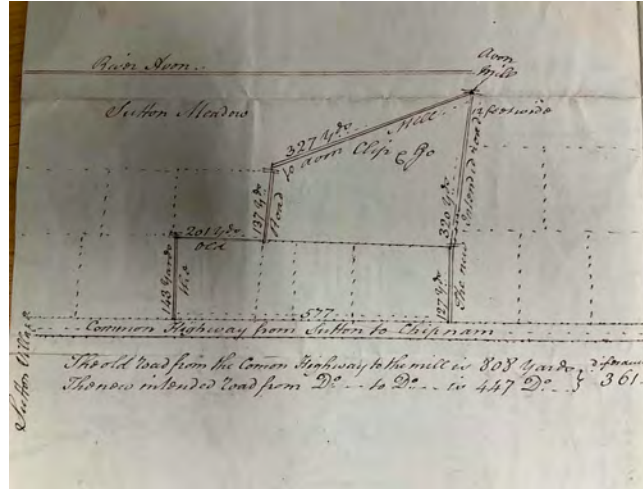
The attached section of the 1840 Tithe Map shows the line of Chissell Brook. The grey portions of the map were in the parish of Sutton Benger at that time, with other parts of

the map in the parishes of Langley Burrell, Christian Malford, Bremhill and a detached part of Draycot Cerne.

The proposed route of the Great Western Railway is clearly shown on this map, crossing land that is part of Sutton Lane Farm, shown at No 210.

Thomas Ferris, yeoman, was the tenant of Sutton Lane Farm in 1840; he paid £434 per year for 211 acres. From 1844 his rent was reduced to £400 per year, because of the loss of 16 acres to the railway company.

The Bridleway to Avon Mill



The 1840 Tithe map shows the bridleway from Sutton Lane to Avon Mill, as it still is today. It also shows the western extension to today's Sutton Lane Meadows.

The bridleway to the Mill was created in 1778; even 'in those days' a landowner had no legal rights to alter historic footpaths. The attached map was part of the original 'planning application' and shows the 'old road from the common highway to the mill' as it zig-zagged across the fields; this was certainly not a road as we use the term today, but was simply a track, probably not very different from the same footpaths today, which still exist as a Public Right of Way.

However, note that the 'new intended road' would be 12 feet wide, making it more suitable for carts going to and from the mill.

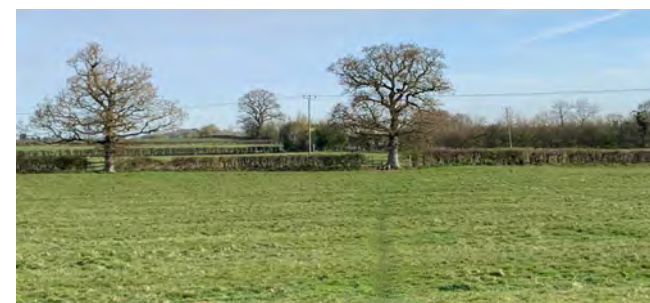
Next On The Trail

Immediately after crossing the brook, southbound into Langley Burrell parish, turn left and follow the footpath alongside the brook for a short distance. Follow it to the right as it turns away from the brook, on a narrow but well-marked path through hedgerows.

You will reach a double gateway; you are at another ancient crossroads of footpaths, with a stile on your left; cross that stile and then go left across the open field, heading past a telephone pole towards the far corner, with the electricity pylon on the horizon ahead of you. Cross the stile, and continue along the narrow track through the trees for about 50 paces.

You have arrived at another wooden bridge over Chissell Brook, taking you back into Sutton Benger parish.

7. Chissell Brook 2





Farm and Gate Farm, but his 'homestead' or farmhouse was at Gate Farm.

From here you will cross the field towards the clump of trees, with the large pylon in the background and then go over a number of stiles and across a few more fields until you reach Sutton Lane Meadows.



The land ahead of you was divided between three farms in the 1800s.

The fields to the east (your right), along Sutton Lane and south of the bridleway to Avon Weir, were Sutton Lane Farm.

The fields ahead of you, south of Chestnut Road (then known as Back Lane), were part of Poplar Farm, where the tenant farmer was John Russ in 1841.

The fields in the west of the village and south of the main road to Draycot were farmed by John Lea, who had the buildings at both Arms



Several generations of the Fry family were tenant farmers at Sutton Lane Farm. The farmhouse is about 200 years old, and is almost identical to the Church Farm farmhouse.

The pair of houses on Sutton Lane, to the south of Sutton Lane Farmhouse (now known as Meadow Farm) were built in the late 1870s as part of a government scheme (known as the Improvement of Lands Act, 1864) to try to improve conditions for farm workers.



Next On The Trail

Cross the bridge over Chissell Brook, going through the two gates, carefully closing each gate behind you. There are often sheep in the next field.

Do not head for the gap in the hedgerow at the far side of the field, but go slightly left towards the clump of trees, with the large pylon in the background.

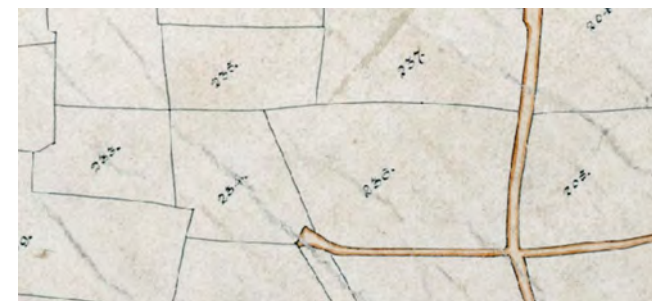
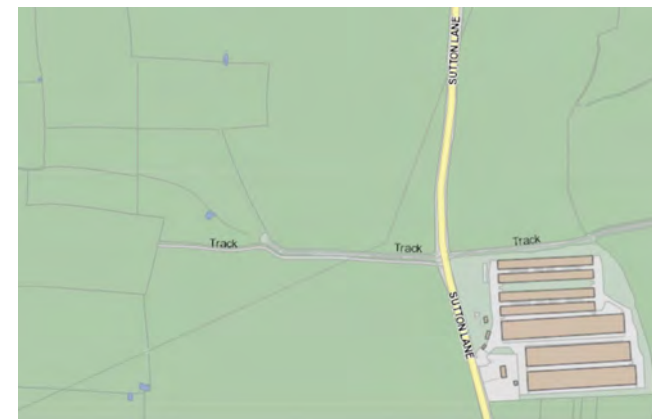
As you get closer you will see the stile in front of you on the corner; this is the stile you saw earlier. Cross the stile and go to your right, up the green lane towards the pylon. But you are not going far - keep an eye out for the stile on your right after about a hundred yards, and cross it into the field. Then go diagonally left, uphill across the field. Head just to the left of the tree on the horizon.

Cross the stile, in the hedge to the left of the tree, and carry on ahead, across the next field, and you will come to a double stile with a little bridge through the next hedgerow. Cross into the next field, and aim at the tree on the right. You will come to another stile, just to the left of that tree.

You have reached the final leg. Go across this field; you should see the path ahead of you, pointing to the hedgerow at the far side. You

will reach a stile that takes you onto a boardwalk into Sutton Lane Meadows.

8. Sutton Lane Meadows





If you look at the two maps, one from 1840 and one from 2020, you will see that hardly anything has changed here. The boundaries of the fields are still the same, the bridleways are still the same.

To use the National Trust's words:

These delightful wildflower meadows are three enclosed fields of exceptionally species-rich, unimproved, neutral grassland, managed as traditional hay meadows, near Chippenham. Two are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the other is a designated County Wildlife Site. With its fantastic population of green-winged and southern marsh orchids, Sutton Lane Meadows is one of the best meadow sites in Wiltshire.

Depending on the time of year, you may want to stroll around and see each of the three meadows, in order to relax and enjoy the flowers and hopefully see some butterflies. If so, head right and go round in an anti-

clockwise direction. You are starting in the south west corner of field No. 233 (see the 1840 map); walk around the boundary, into field No. 234; carry on in an anti-clockwise direction and enter field No. 235. Leave the meadows from the north west corner of field No. 235 and head north towards the village.

If the flowers are not in bloom, or if you just want to return to Sutton Benger, stay left and go around this first meadow (field No. 233) in a clockwise direction to the opposite corner. (Alternatively, if the path through the meadow is well-marked, you might be able to go diagonally across to the far corner). Leave the meadows and follow the marked path into the Big Field, past the entrance to field No. 235, heading north towards the village.

Can you help? Can you identify a Marsh Orchid and other meadow flowers?

Please get in touch if you can tell us what the flowers are in the photographs.

Contact: hello@bengertrails.co.uk

Note that you can find a longer walk to do next time at the link from:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/sutton-lane-meadows>

Next On The Trail

Wander around each of the meadows in turn, or walk around the first field to the far corner, then follow the path north to the Big Field. Whichever way you go round the meadows you will arrive at the north west corner of field No. 235, where you enter the Big Field.

Walk north along the western boundary of the Big Field, towards Sutton Benger, then right (east) along the northern boundary.

You will come to a gap in the hedge on your left; go through that gap and go straight ahead to Queen's Close, past the school, to the Village Hall. (Note that the path which goes diagonally right, direct to the Recreation Ground, is not a Public Right of Way).