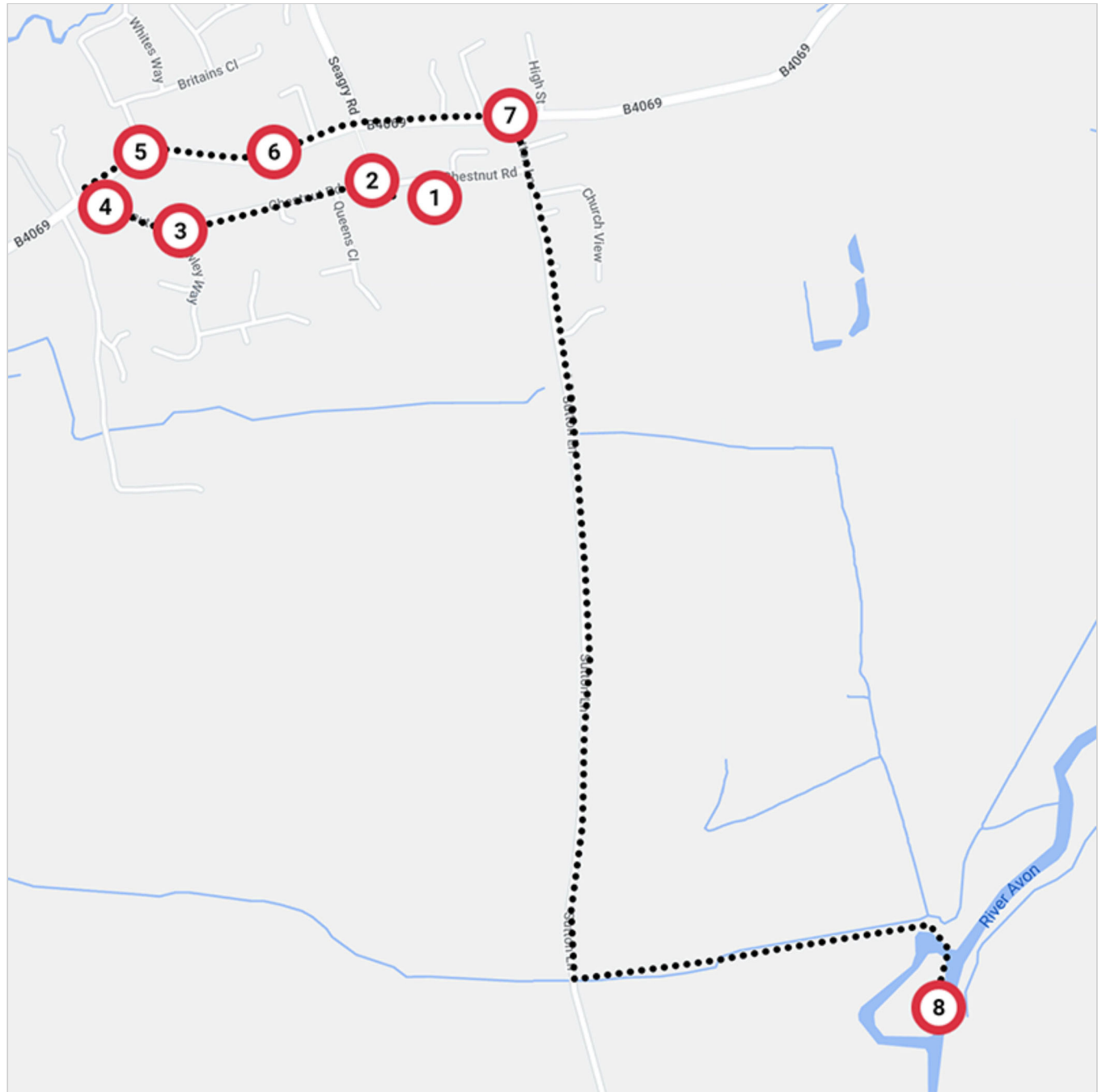


# Benger Trails

## Parish Sign Trail



Map Courtesy of Google Maps



This trail provides more information about places that are listed on the two 'Welcome' signs, one located on the Village Hall and one in Draycot Cerne.

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**Trail** The basic route is about a total of one  
**Length** mile; if you extend it to Avon Weir,  
that will add about another 2 miles.

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**Duration** The basic route is about 20 minutes  
if walking; if you extend it to Avon  
Weir, that will add about another 45  
minutes.

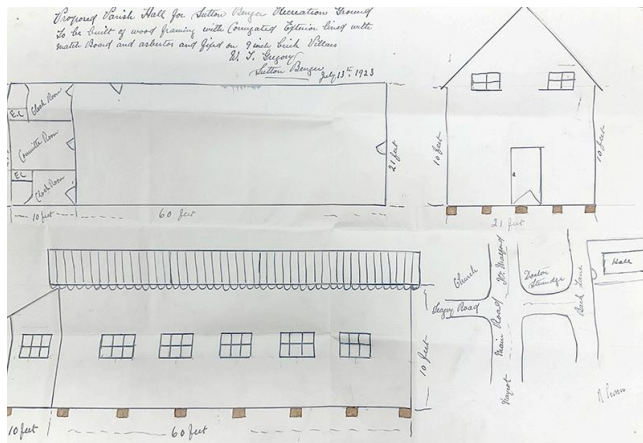
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Walk / Cycle

Walk / Cycle

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## 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

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Go left away from the Village Hall, around the corner, and turn right, cross over Chestnut Road. Stop here and look down Bell Lane.

## 2. Herbing



Herbing began in Sutton Benger in the 19th century and ended in the early 1950s. A herbing business was run by Tom Bray from Bellside. The sheds on the west side of Bellside were used as storage.

The herbs grew in the countryside and people took all day to collect them. Teachers at the school would take the children on nature walks to collect rare herbs. The herbs were sold to make medicines and ointments.

The photographs from the 1920s show people outside the Old School House on Seagry Road after they have been gathering herbs.

For more information about the history of herbing in the village, and other stories of the early 1900s, see 'Life and Herbing in

Sutton Benger; Memories of a Wiltshire Village' by Nesta Heath (Octoprint, Chippenham, 1999).

## Next On The Trail

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Cross back over Chestnut Road and carry on along the footpath down Chestnut Road. Stop before crossing the Cowley Way T-junction and look right.

## 3. Chestnut Road Estate / Poplar Farm Houses







Chestnut Road used to be called 'Back Lane' but was re-named when the land to the south of the village was redeveloped for housing in the 1960s. Cowley Way, Westlake Place, Queens Close, Lee Crescent, Neville Terrace and Gregory Close became known collectively as the Chestnut Road estate.

One of the black and white photographs is from about 1950, when 'Starlings' was being advertised for sale 'within grounds of quiet seclusion, extending to just under one acre ... with substantial pleasure gardens'. The other photo is from the 1960s, when the Chestnut Road estate was being built, looking north east towards 'Starlings' and the church tower. The large white house, now No 9 Chestnut Road, used to be known as 'Wheeler's End'.

## Next On The Trail

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Carry on along Chestnut Road. Stop by the entrance to Chestnut Grove.

### 4. The Garage



The houses on the corner of High Street / Chestnut Road were built about 20 years ago on the site of the village petrol station, which had been there since cars arrived on the roads in the early 1900s. The earliest mention of Frank Dee's 'agricultural motor and general engineer' appears to be the advert in the 1923 Kelly's Directory; however, he may have been there since about 1920 / 1921, when a new building is shown on the site on the Ordnance Survey map.

The garage / petrol station closed in 1986, to be replaced by the Chestnut Grove houses.



## Next On The Trail

Cross over the High Street, turn right and walk along the High Street footpath. Stop before crossing over Heath Avenue T-junction at the housing development called 'The Park'. Look up Heath Avenue.

### 5. The Chicken Factory



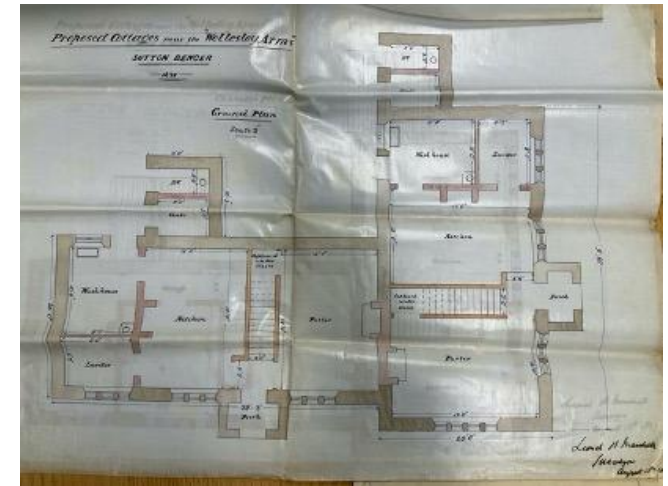
Where the Park development is now built was a Chicken Factory. The entrance to the factory is where Heath Avenue is now located.

This land, between the High Street and the Brook, was originally part of Manor Farm. The factory, in which hens were prepared, was opened in 1958; it went through various changes of ownership over the next 50 years, including Buxted Chicken Ltd, before being replaced by The Park in about 2013.

## Next On The Trail

Cross over Heath Avenue and carry on along the High Street. Stop opposite 'Wheelwrights'.

### 6. Wheelwrights and Carpenters



There were several wheelwrights and carpenters in the village throughout the 1800s. Joseph Gregory arrived in the village around 1890, and by 1891 was in business in the High Street as a wheelwright with his son William. By 1911 it was William who was running the business as a wheelwright and carpenter, as well as a funeral director. He also designed and built the original Village Hall. The business grew throughout the 1900s; William's son Joe inherited the family

business and served on the Parish Council for 35 years. Gregory Close is named after the Gregory family.

Before the new houses were built on the land on the south side of the High Street there were two private houses and a builder's yard. The business closed and the new houses were built; their name 'The Wheelwrights' recognises the history of the site.

The black and white photograph shows 35/37 High Street, with the Wheelwrights buildings behind. 35/37 is an Estate House, originally built in the late 1800s as three houses. It has a crest but no date.

12/14 High Street (the colour photograph) is the Estate House built in 1897 on the corner of High Street and French Gardens Lane; the original design drawings are archived in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre. This house replaced two houses and workshops which stood there throughout the 1800s, and probably earlier. The house / workshop on the corner was a blacksmith's, while the property next to it, closer to The Wellesley, was a carpenter's. From the 1700s to 1870 it was leased to several generations of the Bond family and was known as 'The Wheeler's Shop'.

From 1870 to 1897 it was leased to George Brinkworth, a shoemaker.

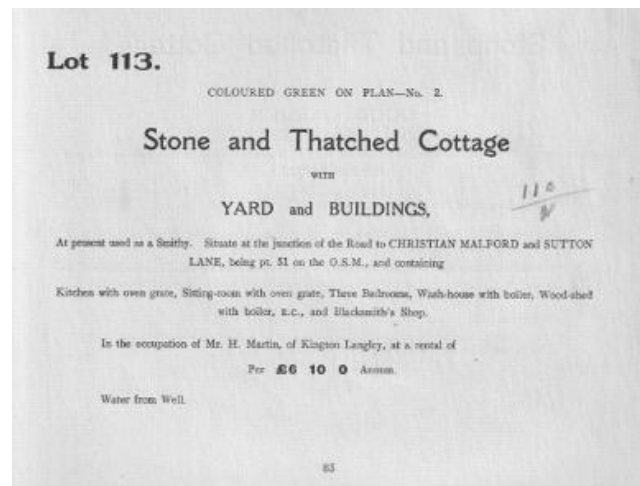
## Next On The Trail

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Carry on along the north side of the High Street. Cross over the Seagry Road junction and continue along the High Street, past the church and the old rectory. Stop on the north side of the High Street, on the pavement outside the old cottages, opposite the Sutton Lane junction.

The house on the opposite corner of High Street / Sutton Lane, known as Forge Cottage, used to be the blacksmith's.

## 7. Blacksmiths



There are up to five locations which might have been where blacksmiths were once located during the 1700s and 1800s, although probably only a maximum of two were active at any one time, usually one at each end of the village. No doubt they were closely associated with the two coaching inns.

The two locations where there were certainly blacksmith's shops are:

- A building which is no longer standing, at the corner of High Street and French Gardens Lane. This was the main smithy in the first half of the 1800s, before Forge Cottage. It ceased to be a blacksmith's around 1890.
- Forge Cottage, corner of High Street and Sutton Lane; this only became a smithy in around 1851, and continued until around 1920.

In addition:

- The Old Corner Shop, corner of High Street and Seagry Road, was probably a blacksmith's in the early 1800s, until about 1840.
- There may have been a blacksmith's on Park Lane at one time.



In fact, there are seven people who were identified as blacksmiths in the 1841 Census:

- John Miles
- James Miles
- Abraham Thomas
- Abraham Marsh
- James Howell
- John Howell
- Thomas Webb

The main blacksmith's near The Wellesley Arms was located where 12-14 High Street is today; this is an Estate Cottage built on the site of two houses and workshops. One was a Carpenter's, while the property on the corner of High Street and French Gardens Lane was a blacksmith's until the new houses were built in 1897.

Forge Cottage, at the opposite end of the village on the corner of High Street and Sutton Lane, was the blacksmith's from about 1850 to the early 1900s. Thomas Bray was in business there by 1851, and his sons were working there through to about 1910. The last blacksmith in the village, Henry Martin, was still working in 1921 when Forge Cottage was sold in the Draycot Estate Auction; however, the 1921 Ordnance Survey map no longer shows it as a 'smithy', as it did in 1895.

## Next On The Trail

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For the short walk, carefull cross the road to the pavement on the west side of Sutton Lane, and just go as far as the right turn along Chestnut Road, between the Rec and Bell Piece, leading you back past the Surgery to the Village Hall.

If you want to extend your walk, and would like to see where Avon Mill was situated, cross over the High Street and walk along Sutton Lane for about a mile until you reach the 'crossroads', where there is a small layby on the right. The bridleyway to the right leads to National Trust's Sutton Lane Meadows; you need to take the bridleyway to your left, which takes you to Avon Weir.

## 8. The Mills





publicly accessible as they are on private land, and there is no access via public footpaths to where the Mills were located.

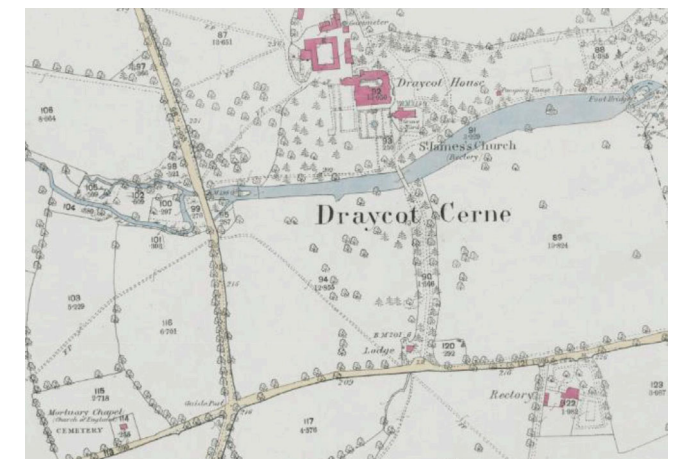
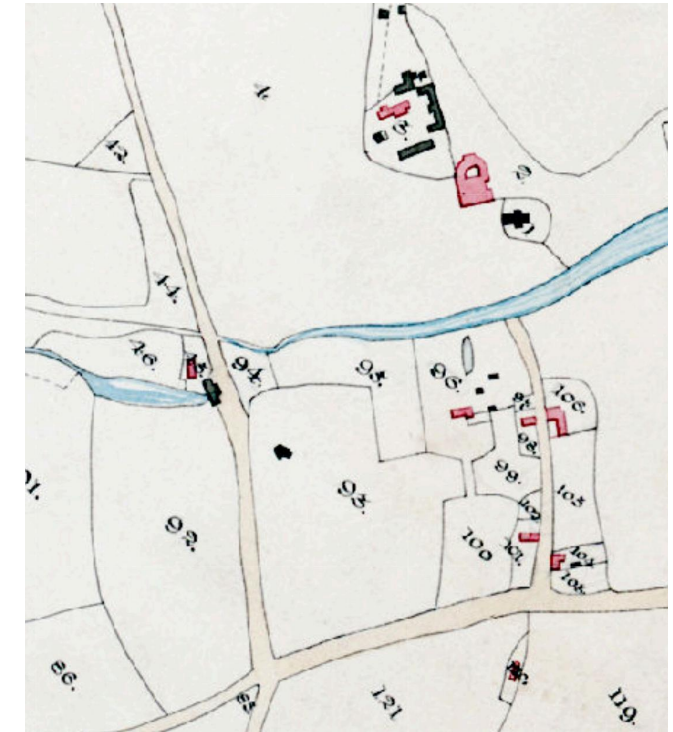
The largest mill in the local area used to be the one at Avon Weir; it was on the fast-flowing river, compared to smaller ones on the brooks and tributaries, and would undoubtedly have been more efficient and cheaper. An old map shows that people from as far away as Kington Langley used to go to the Avon Mill. However, Manorial laws probably meant that people in Sutton Benger and Draycot Cerne had to use the small mills in Draycot, and would have been fined by the Lord of the Manor if they had used Avon.

Avon Weir is accessible via the public bridleway, off Sutton Lane next to Langley Burrell Farm.



There was at least one water mill at Draycot in 1086, and three mills by 1344. One was on the west of the road to Stanton, and one was between Draycot House and Sutton. The last mill (the one on the Stanton Road) can be seen on the 1808 and 1839/1840 maps but was demolished in the mid 1800s. Please note that neither of these locations is

## Draycot Mill





The 1840 map showing Draycot Mill on the west of the Stanton Road also shows the location of the original village of Lower Draycot on the south side of the lake in Draycot Park. The houses, including the old rectory for St James' Church, were cleared in the late 1800s to create a more open parkland, and the villagers were moved to new houses in Draycot Cerne.

The 1885 map shows that the Mill had disappeared, and so had Lower Draycot. This image shows the new parkland, the new rectory on the south side of the main road, and the new Mortuary Chapel.

## 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: ST0546077532  
Local Authority: Wiltshire CC

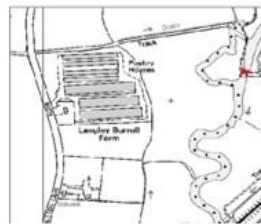


Figure 2 – Avon Mill Radial Gate Location

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 show 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