

*Eckington Wharf is a pleasant place to linger for a while, enjoying the view up river towards Bredon Hill, or watching elegant swans glide beneath the arches of the medieval bridge spanning the River Avon. The wharf is also the ideal starting point for a delightful and undemanding walk which takes you alongside the river to Strensham Lock before returning through Eckington village.*



**1 START** From the Picnic Place cross the road (with care) and join a riverside footpath next to the bridge. The path simply follows the river through flood meadows until you reach Strensham Lock.

**2** Common reeds line the path ahead, while on the far bank two pollarded willows stand guard over a pillbox erected during World War Two, when it was considered necessary to defend river crossings against possible German invasion.

**3** In the next field, notice how narrow it is — this is a feature along this stretch of the Avon, its purpose originally being to ensure that the river frontage was shared between several landowners. Notice, too, a line of splendid pollarded willows along the far bank, and more pollards by Bow Brook, which joins the Avon at this point. The willow, a characteristic riverside tree supports birds such as finches and tits. Other species of birds frequent the river itself. You will certainly see mute swans and mallards, but with a bit of luck you'll also spot herons, kingfishers and perhaps waders such as redshanks, curlews or snipe.

**4** The path passes under a railway bridge, supported on sandstone piers. A prehistoric stone axe head was found near this spot in 1896 and evidence of a Roman settlement was discovered during the construction of the railway in 1838-40.

**5** After you pass a boatyard (on the far bank) the view ahead is dominated by a prominent church, St Philip and St James at Strensham, topping a steep slope, an unusual feature in the Avon Valley.

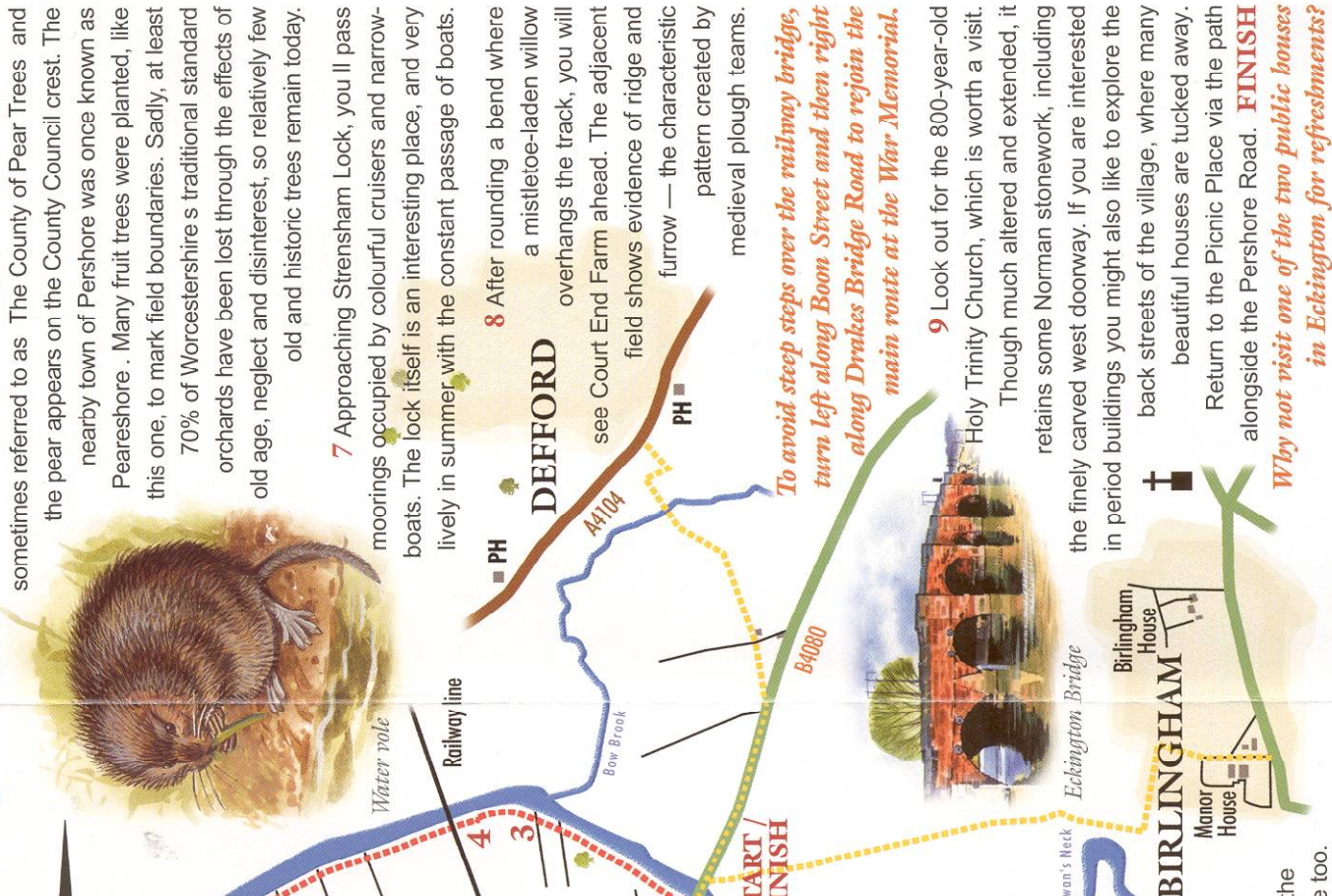
**6** The tree to the left is an old pear tree. Worcestershire is sometimes referred to as The County of Pear Trees and the pear appears on the County Council crest. The nearby town of Pershore was once known as Peareshore. Many fruit trees were planted, like this one, to mark field boundaries. Sadly, at least 70% of Worcestershire's traditional standard orchards have been lost through the effects of old age, neglect and disinterest, so relatively few old and historic trees remain today.

**7** Approaching Strensham Lock, you'll pass moorings occupied by colourful cruisers and narrowboats. The lock itself is an interesting place, and very lively in summer with the constant passage of boats.

**8** After rounding a bend where a mistletoe-laden willow overhangs the track, you will see Court End Farm ahead. The adjacent field shows evidence of ridge and furrow — the characteristic medieval plough teams.

**9** Look out for the 800-year-old Holy Trinity Church, which is worth a visit. Though much altered and extended, it retains some Norman stonework, including the finely carved west doorway. If you are interested in period buildings you might also like to explore the back streets of the village, where many beautiful houses are tucked away. Return to the Picnic Place via the path alongside the Pershore Road. **FINISH**

*Why not visit one of the two public houses in Eckington for refreshments?*



The railway line was good news for Eckington, facilitating the transport of orchard and market garden produce to cities such as Birmingham, Bristol and Gloucester. Sadly, Eckington station was closed in 1965 and most of the orchards and market gardens have gone too.