

Discover Bagendon's Hidden Landscapes

The story of a Cotswold landscape from Iron Age elites to modern farmers



Follow this self-guided trail to discover some of the stories found in the Bagendon landscape.

These stories have been, and continue to be, written by generation after generation of people who live and work here. You will encounter Iron Age blacksmiths, Romano-British elites living in villas, Saxon church builders, First World War soldiers and modern farmers. They give today's landscape its Cotswold character, from fields and traditional buildings, to trees and wildlife.

Two thousand years ago this area was very different. The valley was a major urban centre. It was occupied by one of Europe's first towns, known as an oppidum. Oppida appeared in Britain before the arrival of the Romans during AD 43. They were centres of power where local ruling families controlled trade and the manufacture of goods such as metalwork.

You can't see much of Bagendon's Iron Age town today, though earthworks survive in places. We know about the oppidum because of the work of archaeologists from Durham University who have excavated and conducted geophysical surveys. By AD 60 it was mostly abandoned and the population moved to the Roman town of Corinium (Cirencester) nearby.

Today, most of the land is farmed to produce crops and sheep in a way that protects archaeology and wildlife. Income and environment, past and present, are linked. The connections farmers, land managers and residents have with the landscape also promote a strong sense of local identity. They make Bagendon what it is today.

Visitor Information

Location: Start and end by the church in Bagendon village.

Grid Reference: SP 01137 06624.

Distance: 2 miles / 3km.

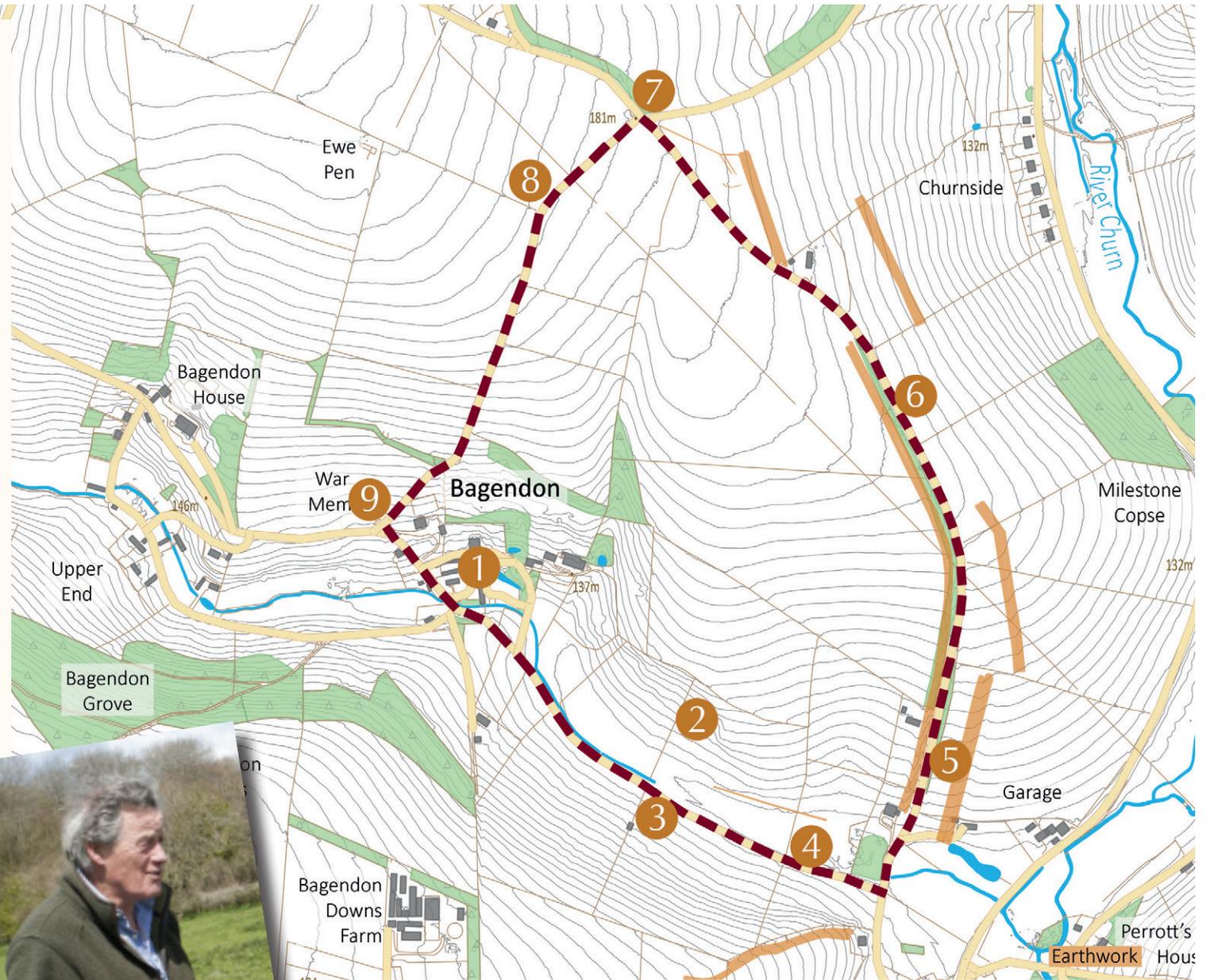
Time: 1 hour.

Difficulty: Follows tarmac lanes with some gentle slopes.

Refreshments: Available at nearby Bathurst Arms.

This map is not intended as a substitute for an Ordnance Survey map. Please wear good shoes and outdoor clothing. Please keep dogs under control. Beware of traffic on the roads.

To see finds from Bagendon oppidum, or discover more about Roman villas and other periods covered in this trail, visit Corinium Museum, Cirencester. For more details, opening hours and entrance fees, visit <https://coriniummuseum.org> or call 01285 655611.



By valuing your landscape you automatically value the other things - archaeology, wildlife... Henry Robinson - Local Farmer

1. Bagendon



Bagendon is a traditional Cotswolds village of stone buildings and thatched cottages. Today's sleepy village hides a long history.

St Margaret's Church has Anglo-Saxon origins, and much of the building you see today dates from the Middle Ages. In the 15th century, the Weavers' Guild of Cirencester had the right to nominate the priest.

The church is also a wildlife habitat. Lichens grow on the gravestones and bats roost inside the church.

The grand house behind the church is Bagendon Manor. The lord of the manor owned a farming estate with the village in the centre. The long building to the right of the church is the tithe barn where farm produce was stored. It also had a water-powered mill where, reputedly, apples were crushed for cider.

Evidence for the Iron Age oppidum has been found throughout the village. Pottery has come from the field next to the Old School opposite the church, and in the grounds of Manor Cottage Guesthouse on the other side of the village. Victorian workmen found Iron Age cremated burials in the garden of the Old Rectory.

Walk along the road past the red telephone box. You will pass some fine old ash trees, identifiable by their black buds and clusters of lance-shaped leaves. Old trees like these are full of hollows, cracks and rot holes that are important for invertebrates, bird nesting sites and bat roosts. Stop when you reach the triangular adult and child pedestrian road sign on the right hand side of the road.

People love the Cotswold landscape. I think this appreciation links strongly to the pale colours of the stone, and its harmonious relationship with the built environment and the landscape from which it is quarried. It gives the Cotswold landscape a strong sense of unity. (Mark Connelly - Cotswolds AONB)

2. Roman Villa

Look across the valley to the small group of trees on the other side, known as Black Grove. Geophysics and a laser survey from the air detected what looked like stone buildings sitting on the platform to the right of the trees. In 2015, archaeologists revealed this was a Roman villa, with underfloor heating in one room and painted walls. It was built on top of Iron Age pits, probably soon after most of the people here had moved to the new Roman town.

It was one of many villas built in the Bagendon area soon after the Roman conquest. Two have been found by geophysics near the village, one in the field north of the war memorial, while others are known at Woodmancote and Stancombe nearby.

The families living in these villas were some of the local elites, who took on high-status Romanised ways of living. The villas may have been the country estates for people from nearby Corinium (Roman Cirencester), where the Romans had moved most of the oppidum's population. The oppidum would have had an air of decline by this time. Were these people trying to reflect their status in the new Roman society by showing they had links to the past rulers of the oppidum?



Durham University's excavations in 2015 at the Roman villa close to Bagendon village.

Walk just a little further along the road until you reach the dry-stone wall on your right.

3. Walls and Horses

Medieval boundaries were dry-stone walls and hedges, and both are good for wildlife. They prevent soil erosion, act as corridors for wildlife across the landscape, provide nooks and crannies for reptiles, invertebrates and mammals, and perching and nesting sites for birds. Surfaces of walls are good for mosses and lichens.

The fences you see in the valley are recent and built for horses. This makes another link with the Iron Age. Horses were an important symbol of the people who lived in the oppidum and were commonly represented on the coins minted at Bagendon.

The horses today are not working animals, as would have drawn ploughs and carts in the past, but for leisure riding. Recreation may be more important to today's Cotswolds economy than farming, but farming creates the landscape character that attracts tourists.

Stop at the little inturned gateway on the left-hand side of the road.

4. Heart of the Oppidum

You are in the industrial heart of the 2,000-year-old oppidum, surrounded by timber roundhouses and workshops with thatched roofs. Built close to each other, the buildings extended across the valley and back towards the modern village. Though there is little to see today, geophysics has mapped the otherwise invisible remains below ground.

The oppidum is much busier, noisier and smellier than today's fields. People move around you - working, carrying produce, walking between houses. Their voices mingle with sounds of work - the percussion of blacksmiths' hammers, bellows fanning the fires of forges and the striking of newly minted coins. Competing smells of newly cut thatch, household hearths and iron forges fill the air.



(Left) A Late Iron Age coin from the oppidum, showing the horse, a symbol of the people who lived here. (Right) A Middle Iron Age spearhead from the settlement near Scrubditch, north of Bagendon, which immediately preceded the oppidum. Photos courtesy of Jeff Veitch.

The massive oppidum was one of the major Iron Age power centres in Britain. Important rulers controlled and profited from trade and the production of goods, including coins. Bagendon compared in size and status to such notable centres of Iron Age Britain as Camulodunum (Colchester) and Verulamium (St Albans).

The stream through the centre of the oppidum provided water to drink, wash and quench newly forged iron tools and weapons. But it could also bring floods to the boggy valley. The church floor was raised in 1832 after a flood. The Iron Age population canalised the streams using stone-lined drains, most probably to control water for iron smelting and smithing.

Today, this hive of activity and elite power lies buried below the quiet pastures grazed by sheep and horses.



Our archaeological investigations have demonstrated this was a thriving place, the centre of a large kingdom whose leaders were allies of the Emperor in Rome. (Tom Moore - Durham University)

Walk further along the road. Look at the skyline to your right, where the trees grow, to spot one of the earthen rampart boundaries of the oppidum. Turn left at the T-junction and walk uphill.

5. Ramparts

The Iron Age inhabitants of the oppidum were not naked barbarians. As this brooch from the site reveals, they were keen to show off their fine clothing and jewellery. Photo courtesy of Jeff Veitch.



You are now walking between two of the oppidum's massive boundaries. The one on the left survives as an earthen rampart and ditch. The other is no longer visible in the field to your right. Originally, the rampart was higher and treeless.

Over 4km in length, there were two or three lines of ramparts in places such as here and to the south. They were built to show how important the oppidum was, as well as to enclose it.



Today, the ramparts form wildlife corridors. They are dominated by mature beech trees, along with hazel, oak, holly, field maple and yew. Look out for impressive bracket fungus on tree trunks. In spring and summer you can see dog's mercury, bluebells and wood anemone. These wildflowers indicate the long history of woodland in the places they grow.

From geophysics we know much of the oppidum was not occupied. Instead, the large open spaces were probably used to corral vast numbers of livestock supplied as tribute to Bagendon's Iron Age elites, to hold markets and for assemblies of the local population.

Continue up the road, along the line of the oppidum boundary, until you can look through a gap in the hedge on your right for a view of the landscape.

6. Farming the Cotswolds



This is a typical Cotswolds landscape – rolling countryside of arable fields with some pastures and woodlands. Ploughs can damage archaeological remains that survive below ground. Here, local farmers are part of Countryside Stewardship Schemes, and work with Natural England to help conserve archaeology and wildlife, while still making a living from the land. Pastures and



shallow ploughs protect the fragile archaeology. You might also spot farmland birds, such as corn buntings, which thrive on wildflower seeds and insects that intensive farming would diminish.

Continue until you reach the crossroads.

7. Connected Community

The oppidum was well-placed on important long-distance routeways. The Churn Valley was an easy route across the Cotswolds between the Thames and Severn valleys. Bagendon's location allowed it access to the resources of the Thames Valley (beef) and the Cotswolds (wheat, sheep). These routes also brought prestige goods from across Britain and Europe.



Roman roads were built on some of these Iron Age routes, and modern roads on top of the Roman ones.

There was a set of small enclosures here in the centuries pre-dating the oppidum. They were probably used for

seasonal meetings of the local population and show that Bagendon was a significant place long before the oppidum was built.

Turn left at the crossroads to follow the road signposted 'Bagendon'. Stop where you can see fields either side.

8. Conserving the Cotswolds

It is nice to think there was a large pre-Roman encampment here and that they were probably sheep farming. There is a deep history and connection between farming and archaeology then and now. (Local Farmer)



Wildflowers thrive in uncultivated field margins. Photo courtesy of Henry Robinson.

One of the differences you will notice about the fields is that those to the right are used for arable crops, those on the left for pasture. Why? Because the soil has been exhausted by ploughing since the Second World War, so some farmers have reverted to sheep farming to make the best of their soil.

This mix of arable and sheep pasture is the traditional Cotswolds farming of the last few hundred years. Farming during the Iron Age was a similar mix too, determined by what different parts of the land could support.

You'll see that the arable field on your right has uncultivated margins where wildflowers grow. Here the farmer manages the land to help conserve wildlife as part of Natural England's

Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Wildflowers support bees and other pollinators. Listen out for skylarks flying above the fields. They feed on the flowers' seeds and the insects that live on the wildflowers. The fields are also home to lapwings, who flourish on the mix of arable, fallow and pasture. Both birds are now rare due to intensive farming.

Carry on along the road and down the hill until you reach Bagendon's war memorial by the road junction.

9. Parks, Wars and Lost Houses

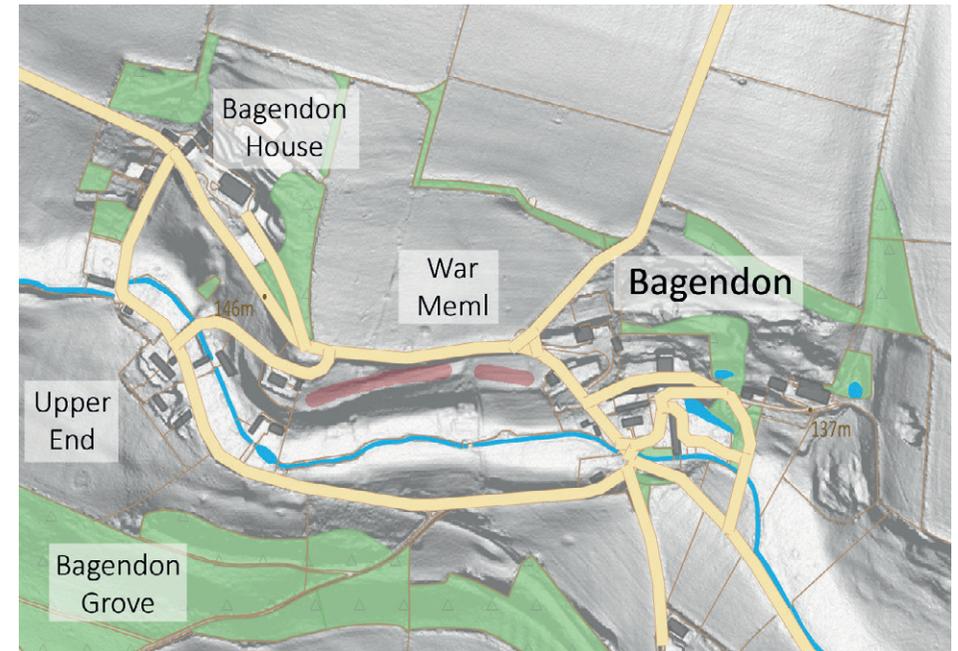


The war memorial remembers 13 men from Bagendon who died during the First World War.

The war memorial with the former parkland behind.

The field behind the memorial is carefully planted with trees. This is a parkland of the New Bagendon Manor. It was landscaped in the 19th century after the countryside had become idealised by landowners as something to be viewed.

About halfway up this field is another small Roman villa found using geophysics. It was built inside a ditched enclosure that may have been Iron Age. Like other villas in the area, it suggests continuity from Iron Age inhabitants to wealthy Roman landowners.



There are two clusters of houses in Bagendon; one around the church, the second along the road beyond this parkland. Were there more buildings in-between? They may have been built on the artificial terraces just below the road, overlooking the brook below you. The terraces are marked in red on the map above. One has been found by geophysics. Perhaps the village shrank during the Medieval period.

The valley opposite is quite wooded, but many of the trees have been planted since the 1950s. The area had far fewer trees during the Iron Age. There were fewer trees and more dry-stone walls until the late 20th century when agricultural mechanisation and poor pay led to an increasingly smaller population working the

land. Some farmers sold up and their farmhouses have become residential properties. Now only a couple of hundred people live in the area.

We hope you have enjoyed discovering how centuries of human activity have created Bagendon's landscape. It would not look the way it does or provide habitats for wildlife without this past. And the story is still being written as today's generations continue to shape the landscape that provides livelihoods, wellbeing and a sense of place.

We would love to hear your feedback. Follow this link to comment <http://bit.ly/Bagendon>.

If you would like to find out more about the archaeology of Bagendon visit Corinium Museum <https://coriniummuseum.org> and the Bagendon Archaeological Project website <http://www.bagendonproject.org>.

To learn more about the ways in which heritage, farming and the environment are managed visit the REFIT project website <http://www.refitproject.com>.

To find out more about the work of Cotswolds AONB and Natural England go to <http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk> & <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

For information about Durham University Department of Archaeology visit <https://www.dur.ac.uk/archaeology>.

If you have enjoyed this trail and want to find out more about the Cotswolds you can visit <http://www.escapetothecotswolds.org.uk>.

You can also take a walk with the other Cotswolds self-guided trail in this series to explore 'Greystones, a landscape through time' near Bourton-on-the-Water <http://bit.ly/Greystones>.



Aerial photograph of the excavations at the settlement near Scrubditch showing the Iron Age ditches, postholes and pits, which are all that remain - hidden beneath this field of wheat. Photo courtesy of Mark Houshold.

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