

ABINGDON'S



1556 Boundary WALK

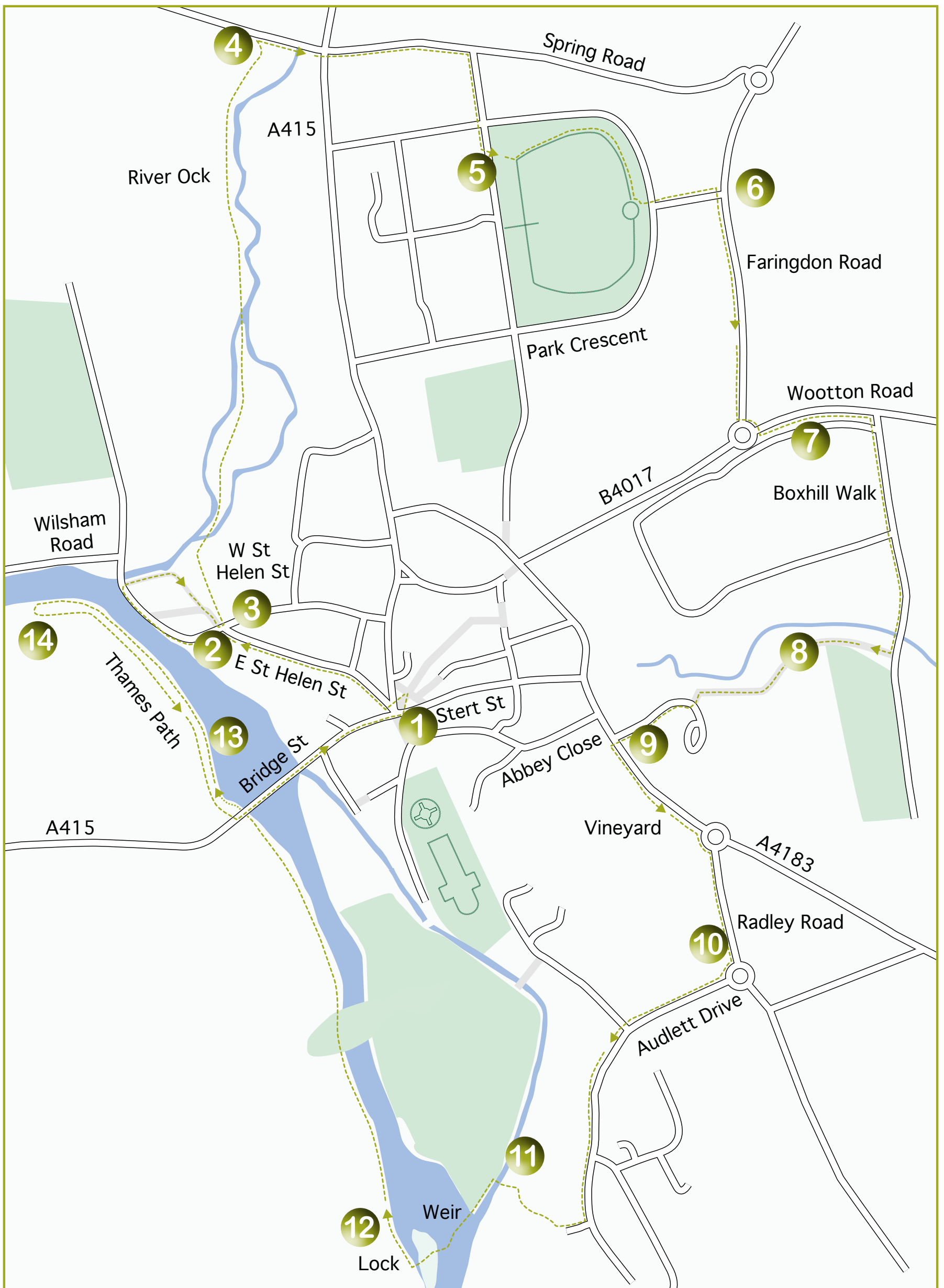
The 1556 boundary was established with the Royal Charter of 1556. After the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey in 1538 and the Fraternity of the Holy Cross in 1547, Abingdon needed institutions to look after the poor and the sick and to educate its population. The Royal Charter set out Abingdon's boundaries very clearly along with the responsibilities of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses within those boundaries.

The 1556 boundary was marked by boundary stones. The existing boundary stones in Abingdon have a metal letter 'A' on them as set out in the Charter of 1556.

'Beating the Bounds' was laid down in the Charter and this meant people were regularly reminded of the boundaries and local officials could check that there were no infringements.

According to a written account of 'Beating the Bounds', in 1880, at each stone, small boys were 'bumped' against the stone and the stones would be beaten by the 'wandbearer'.

'Beating the Bounds' was a serious undertaking but seems to have been quite an entertaining spectacle at times. Traditionally, cakes, ale, tea and coins were distributed to residents along the route. In 1880, 400 cakes were provided and 2 or 3 casks of ale which each contained 16 gallons.



1. Start the walk by St Nicolas Church, the old church of Abingdon Abbey. This walk will take about 2 1/2 hours to complete.
2. Walk down East St Helen Street enjoying the historic buildings. At the junction with West St Helen Street turn left to St Helen's Wharf walking past the Anchor pub. Turn right after the pub and walk up the private road towards St Helen's Mill. Take the path on the right, past Twitty's almshouses, through the churchyard and out by the entrance to the church.

3. Turn left on West St Helen Street and immediately turn left again following the sign for the Ock Valley River Walk. Follow the path walking straight ahead and you will eventually enter the Ock Valley River Walk.



This is a very attractive woodland walk running alongside the River Ock. It can be muddy in wet weather. In 1880 a boat carried councillors and officials along the River Ock. There were some duckings of councillors and also the police superintendent!

4. Emerge onto Drayton Road. Turn right and walk towards Ock Street. The bridge you are crossing is Ock Bridge and still has its medieval arches beneath the modern road. Walk to the junction with Ock Street. Cross over and walk along Spring Road.
5. Turn right into Park Road, enter Albert Park and follow the path along the left-hand side of the park until you reach the statue of Prince Albert. Enjoy this little gem of a green space.
6. Walk out of the park on the road behind the statue which is part of Park Crescent. Turn right onto Faringdon Road up to the roundabout.
7. Turn left onto Wootton Road. By John Mason School see if you can find the boundary marker by the bus stop. It is one of 15 Parliamentary boundary markers placed in 1870 to mark the Parliamentary constituency, not a 1556 boundary stone.





8. Cross the road and proceed down to the end of Boxhill Walk crossing the little bridge over the River Stert. In 1880 the bridge was missing and the Town Clerk tried to leap across but landed in the water. Turn right onto a path which takes you through Boxhill Woods. Another little green gem to enjoy.
9. Follow the footpath through Boxhill Woods and at the end turn left up to The Motte. Turn right and walk to The Vineyard. Turn left up to the roundabout and turn right onto Radley Road. There used to be a boundary stone where the roundabout is now!
10. Walk along the right-hand side of Radley Road and then turn right onto Audlett Drive. Continue down Audlett Drive turning right along Crabtree Place. Follow Crabtree Place to the gravelly path. Follow this path to the footbridge.
11. Cross the footbridge over the Abbey Mill Stream and turn immediately left to walk across the weir and towards Abingdon Lock. In 1880 punts were provided to carry dignitaries to the boundary stones. Unfortunately there was some horseplay and people ended up in the river.





12. Cross over the lock and turn right towards Abingdon looking out for the first surviving boundary stone. You should find it in the hedge, near the lock, on your right, as you walk towards Abingdon Bridge.

13. Continue along the river path to Abingdon Bridge. Go under the bridge into Hales Meadow. There are four more boundary stones to be found along this path. Two are from 1556, each with a Parliamentary boundary marker stone from 1870 nearby. The first pair of stones are on the grass, on your left, almost opposite the far end of Nag's Head Island and the other pair are further along the path, near where the River Thames turns opposite Wilsham Road on the opposite river bank. At about this point, in 1880, the Wandbearer and the Borough Surveyor swam across the River Thames following the course of the boundary line.





14. Well done! You have completed 'Beating the Bounds'. In 1880, at the end of the 'Beating the Bounds', buns, money and packets of tea were thrown to the crowd from the roof of Abingdon County Hall and a banquet was held for the Mayor, the councillors and invited guests. Return to Abingdon for your own banquet. Retrace your steps through Hales Meadow and cross Abingdon Bridge.



We hope you have enjoyed this walk. Return to the Market Square for some well-earned refreshment