

**11 ROMAN VILLAS**

The map shows the sites of two rich villas where luxurious silver ornaments were excavated by Edmund Artis, likely helped by his friend, John Clare.



The views enjoyed would have been similar to what you see today. Roman fishermen would have caught fish here but probably not carefully returned the fish to the river as today's anglers do.

**12 BARBEL TREE**

Conservation is undertaken all along this route to ensure the best possible environment for barbel and chub and the wildlife that lives along the backwaters. There are sightings of Otters, Bittern, Little Egrets, (very un-common) European Dipper, the native Kingfisher and a growing population of the Scarce Chaser Dragonfly.



FROM THE IRON BRIDGE RETRACE YOUR STEPS TO THE VILLAGES FOR REFRESHMENT OR TAKE ANY OF THE MANY FOOTPATHS AND WANDER JUST LIKE JOHN CLARE.

**STARTING THE WALK**

**1 AILSWORTH GREEN**

The information board on the Green gives a snapshot of the village. There is evidence of settlements here since prehistorical times, but probably the village was a Roman farmstead, growing with housing for workers.



**2 THE AILSWORTH WITCH**

On the information board is the recorded details of her crime and punishment. However, she may well have been a victim of a land-deal. Widowed with a son and an attractive estate, she refused a marriage, was found guilty of witchcraft and drowned for her sins. Her son was outlawed, and, by coincidence, her estate given to a relative of her suitor.



CROSS THE PETERBOROUGH ROAD AND WALK DOWN STATION ROAD

**10 RIVERSIDE AND OVER THE WEIR**

South of the river is the little Church of St Remigius, the Bishop who converted Clovis, King of the Franks in AD496. Mentioned in the Domesday book, it has been rebuilt, but retains a Roman coffin near the south porch.



The weir was built to support grinding corn at Water Newton Mill but the course of the river and much of the wildlife is unchanged.

Flowering Rush



Arrowhead



CROSS THE WEIR AND TURN TO THE RIGHT, FOLLOWING THE RIVERSIDE FOOTPATH EASTWARDS BESIDE A BRAMBLE HEDGE.

**9 THE WATER NEWTON TREASURE**

The hoard lay hidden somewhere close to the banks of the Nene from around 425 to 1974 when it was found by a metal detectorist. It may have been the stash of thieves, loot of marauding Saxons or, most likely, hidden for safety by a wealthy Christian community. Symbols on some of the pieces show this to be the earliest Christian mass silver in the world.



Held in the British Museum but copies in Peterborough Museum

RETRACE YOUR STEPS, CROSS BACK OVER THE LOCK AND TURN LEFT TO WALK WESTWARDS ALONG THE RIVERBANK.

**8 WATER NEWTON**

Cross the lock and follow the footpath to the left which crosses the mill race.

Originally Saxon 'new town near water', just west of a major Roman Fort, visible as a high point in the fields to the east of the village.



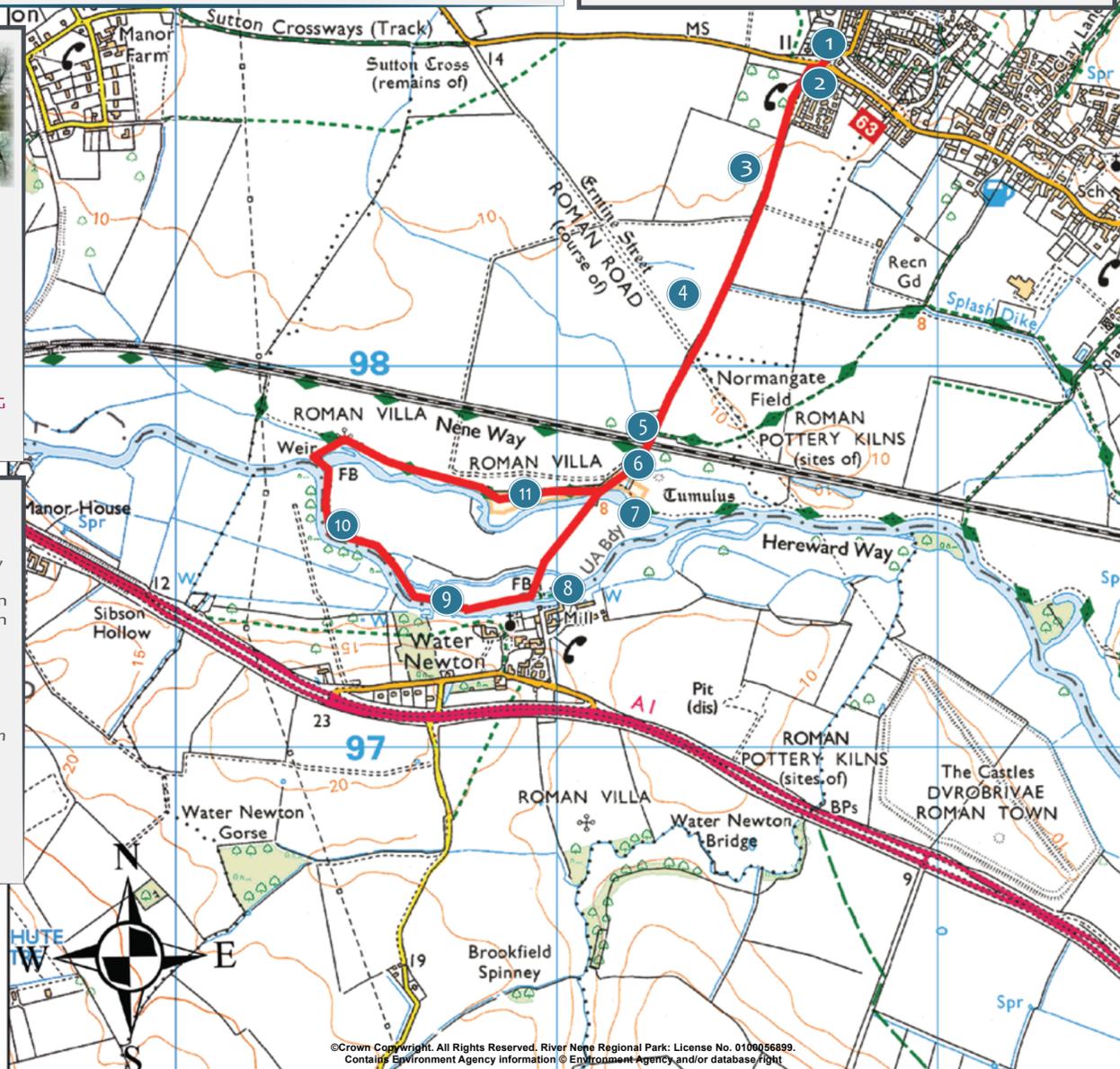
Mill Race

**THE MILL**

The mill was built in 1791, two years before John Clare's birth. He would certainly have known it.

"... To the old mill farewell, to the lock, pens, and waters, To the miller himself, and his three bonny daughters..."

A picturesque building which has been used as a film location.



**7 THE TUMULUS (GRAVE MOUND)**

Grave mounds are always built in locations of spiritual, geographical or aesthetic significance and the view here is as beautiful as it was thousands of years ago. This view was later enjoyed by six Roman villas, homes of the elite, who may have been the masters of industry or the bureaucrats from the praetorium. This was one of the largest Roman buildings in Britain and stood on the site of St Kyneburghas Church. It is believed to have been the administrative centre of the Fenlands.



The mound rises on the right of the picture



Musk beetles love the willows



Marsh Marigolds



Banded Demoiselle Dragonflies

CROSS THE IRON BRIDGE AND FOLLOW THE FOOTPATH OVER THE FIELDS TO WATER NEWTON

**6 THE NENE VALLEY RAILWAY**

Once the innovative railway that took traffic away from the River Nene, today a lovely volunteer-run steam railway that gives passengers a unique view of the landscape.



Walk over the crossing, keeping a watch for steam trains and look to your left for some of the willow trees which have always grown here. You will notice that the ground rises towards the river.

**5 THE STATION MASTERS**



A secret garden, once a home, flowering with daffodils, lilacs and trees producing their fruit. White violets are common in the early spring. Always a picnic spot for those who know of it.

**3 STATION ROAD once WILLOW ROAD**

This led to a regularly used train stop, now a crossing on the charming Nene Valley Railway. Willows abound on this walk, watch out for them and the meadow habitats that increase as you approach the river.



**A ROMAN INDUSTRIAL SITE.**

Look around and try to imagine one of the largest industrial sites in Roman Britain.



Geophysical map by Durham University

Smelly, smoky, mucky furnaces and kilns crammed tight together. This geophysical map gives a feel for what it would have been like around here around 1600 years ago. Shards of pottery are often found. Castor Ware was exported all over Britain, mostly on this peaceful river.

A longer walk with more detailed information about our Roman heritage is available in Roman Castor Route Guide.

**4 MILADY'S POND**

Look west to the copse, hiding two linked ponds, where remains of Roman paddocks have been found. Close to the junction of Ermine Street and King Street this was a stop on journeys across England. Analysis of the water shows the ponds connect to those in Castor Hanglands, the most biologically diverse in the country.



Reed Bunting

Here reed buntings breed amongst great willowherb, meadow vetchling and tufted vetch.



Tufted Vetch

JUST BEFORE THE RAILWAY CROSSING, LOOK RIGHT FOR A GAP IN THE HEDGE AND ACCESS TO THE STATION MASTER'S GARDEN.

## PRACTICAL MATTERS..

This is a flood plain so it can be wet, sometimes seriously flooded but there has never been a time when, suitably shod, it has not been possible to walk down Station Road, cross the Nene Valley Railway and admire the backwater from the iron bridge.

As a flood plain it is wonderful farming land and sheep and cattle sometimes graze here. The flat land makes them easy to see, but be vigilant as ewes, panicked by walkers' dogs, have drowned in the river and walkers, afraid of cattle, may wish to avoid them.



Parking is in laybys on the Peterborough Road. Close by in Castor there is more behind the village hall, at the restaurant, church and pubs.

## A SPACE TO BREATHE

This area has been a space to breathe and enjoy for millennia. Thousands of children learned to swim here (or not).

Reckless non-swimmers sailed down the river in lorry inner tubes from Taylors Transport and live to tell the tale. It provided respite for a country at war. Today birdwatchers, kayakers, canoers, canoeists, paddlers, picnickers, anglers, walkers, cyclists, riders and just amblers enjoy the banks of the river and need a bite to eat.

In the villages there are a choice of refreshments.



Arthur and Ester Stone with evacuees, Annie and June



### The Coffee House 107A Peterborough Road, Ailsworth

Perfect coffee, loose leaf tea, breakfasts, lunches, delicious cakes and light bites to eat or take-away. Cosy Cafe with gifts, cards incorporating Quentin Marks Estate Agents.

### The Prince of Wales Feathers 38 Peterborough Road, Castor

Dog and Walker friendly with real ale and home cooked lunches.



### The Chubby Castor 34 Peterborough Road, Castor

Civilised dining restaurant with a summer terrace, serving food and drinks. Perfect for walkers with dogs

### The Royal Oak 24 Peterborough Road, Castor

A welcoming pub with real ale and expert cocktails.



And **The Village Store** will provide ice-creams and food for a picnic.



Over this area 116 species of animals have been recorded, including 15 conservation priority species and 8 red data-listed birds. The Skylark, Yellow Hammer, Chiffchaff and Reed Bunting all breed and sing here.

• North east, over the fields is the spire of St Kyneburgha Church, where a Roman palace, twice the size of Peterborough Cathedral once stood.

• North is the ridge and tree-line of Castor Hanglands and the remains of Rockingham Forest.

As you walk, look around at ancient landmarks:

## LONG VIEW

Mayfly



A three-mile stroll to and along the backwaters of the Nene. It crosses the Nene Valley Railway where trains still run, down to the river and over the iron bridge to Water Newton Mill and its river lock. A circular riverside walk goes over a weir before returning to the villages. Wildlife is rich around the whole of the riverbank. In season there are large gatherings of Swallows and Mayflies, good indicators of clean waters.

## AN AMBLE AROUND THE RIVER

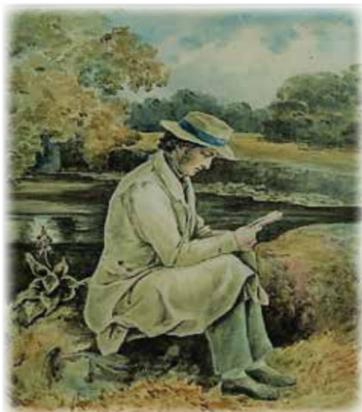
## THE STORY

North of the Nene's fertile flood meadows, the land rises and clay gives way to a limestone ridge that runs across England from the Cotswolds. Where clay and limestone meet, springs form, rising and sinking on their way to the river.

A grave mound by the river tells of people living here at least four thousand years ago. Here the Romans found a source of food, water, fairly amenable neighbours and a transport hub. Emperors crossed these fields, legions looked for a rest and watering hole. The river was a busy transport route carrying materials and finished items for sale.

Saxons followed, roads became green ways and tracks and the layers built creating a balance of land and wildlife that no-one saw more clearly than the poet John Clare.

This is the John Clare Country where the poet walked throughout his youth, observing minutely.

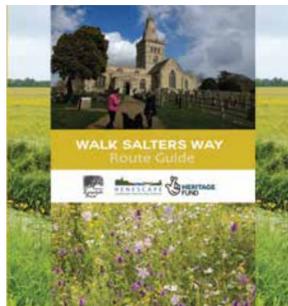
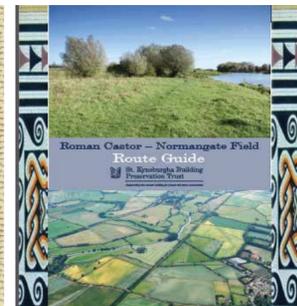
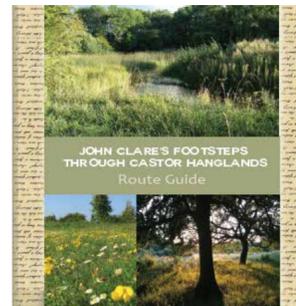


As a child, he lost himself on Ailsworth Heath; his Grandfather, John Stimson, was Castor town shepherd. Clare studied and recorded the wildlife of this area with the head gardener of Milton Hall, John Henderson, exchanging specimens including a hart's tongue fern, found 'growing in a well at Caister'. Clare was a friend of Edmund Artis, head steward at Milton Hall, a curious and able man and an accomplished archaeologist with whom John Clare worked.

"... I found the poems in the fields and only wrote them down."

## WHERE NEXT...

History, wildlife and guides to the Nene valley and John Clare Country.



See those created by Langdyke Trust <https://langdyke.org.uk> and Nene Park [www.nenepark.org.uk/visit-us/things-to-do/walk](http://www.nenepark.org.uk/visit-us/things-to-do/walk)

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Thanks go to the Many Organisations also shared skills and materials.

### Peterborough & District Angling Association



What they all have in common is the determination to make this environment enjoyable, better understood and protected



## An amble around the river Route Guide

