



Clare Castle

This picturesque route takes in a number of villages that are steeped in religious history. Both the short and touring routes have moderate hills, but these are worth it for the beautiful views over the Stour valley.

The starting point (★) is Clare Castle stone keep which dates back to William the Conqueror. Now a country park it is situated next to the River Stour and has ample parking.

Shortly after leaving the town you pass Clare Priory (1) which was founded in 1248 and is the mother house of the Augustinian Friars in Britain. The attractive grounds and ruins are open to the public.

As you approach Belchamp St Paul you pass St Andrew's Church and St Paul's Hall (2). During Henry VIII's reign Arthur Golding resided at the Hall. He is a well-known scholar, there are some people who believe that he and his brother-in-law Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, were the real authors of Shakespeare's plays!

In front of St Paul's Hall is St Andrew's church. First recorded in 1181 it was rebuilt during the 15th century. The chancel has two choir stalls with decorated misericords (sometimes named mercy seats) and is one of only two in Essex to have them.

Past the village of Ovington you reach Ridgewell Airfield (3) which was built during WWII to host the American Air Force and the famous B17 bombers.

The next point of interest is Ashen Church (4). It is of 12th century origin and had a distinguished rector, Matthew Parker, who was appointed chaplain to Anne Boleyn in 1533, and after her execution, to King Henry VIII. He was later made Dean of the College of Stoke by Clare and then Master of Corpus Christi. In 1559 he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by Elizabeth I.

At Ashen the short route turns back to Clare while the touring route continues on to Stoke by Clare. This village is home to Stoke College (5), which was established in 1415 as a college for

priests. During the English reformation the Dean of the college was Matthew Parker (a future Archbishop of Canterbury). Today Stoke College is an independent school.

The touring route then continues through Stoke by Clare and Chilton Street.

Both routes return to the pretty town of Clare (6), which gained its wealth from the woollen trade and cloth industry that began during the middle ages. The town has a number of important buildings and attractions, which makes it well worth exploring further.

REFRESHMENTS

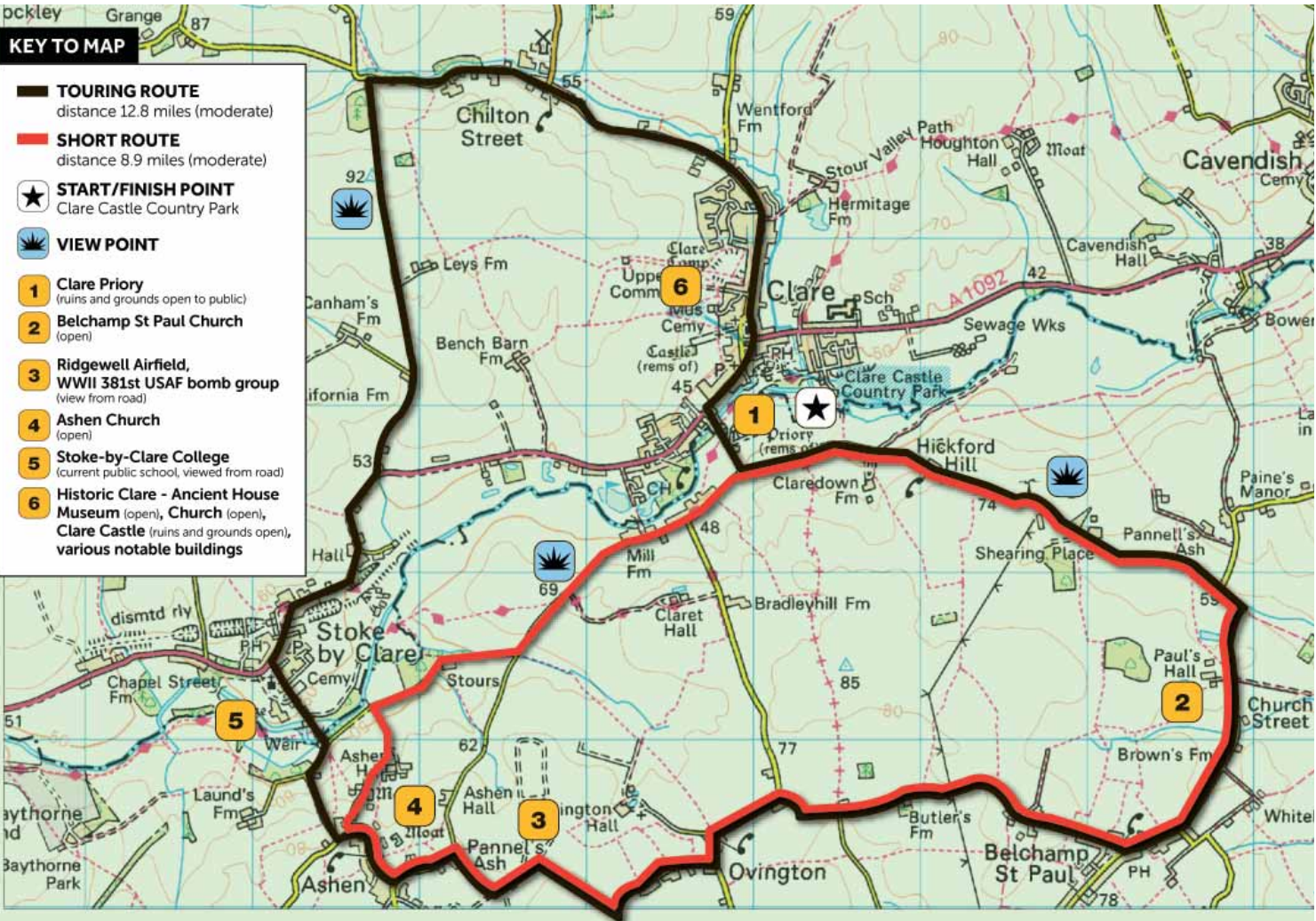
Various cafés and public houses in Clare, and public houses in Stoke by Clare and Belchamp St Paul.

TOILETS

Clare Castle Country Park.



Clare Priory



KEY TO MAP

TOURING ROUTE
distance 12.8 miles (moderate)

SHORT ROUTE
distance 8.9 miles (moderate)

START/FINISH POINT
Clare Castle Country Park

VIEW POINT

- 1** Clare Priory
(ruins and grounds open to public)
- 2** Belchamp St Paul Church
(open)
- 3** Ridgwell Airfield,
WWII 381st USAF bomb group
(view from road)
- 4** Ashen Church
(open)
- 5** Stoke-by-Clare College
(current public school, viewed from road)
- 6** Historic Clare - Ancient House
Museum (open), Church (open),
Clare Castle (ruins and grounds open),
various notable buildings