

SAINT EDWARD'S WAY

St Edward's Way commemorates the removal of the Saxon king and martyr's body from Wareham, following his murder at Corfe Castle, for reburial in Shaftesbury Abbey in AD 979, and runs for some 33 miles between the two towns. It can be conveniently broken into three stages:

1. Wareham to Winterborne Kingston
2. Winterborne Kingston to Shillingstone, and
3. Shillingstone to Shaftesbury.

The walk begins at the west door of Lady St Mary Church in Wareham and for the first five miles follows the Wareham Forest Way through some of the lesser known landscapes of north Purbeck and east Dorset.

Leave Church Green by the passageway on the left that leads to the town quay beside the River Frome. Cross South Street to Abbots Quay and follow it round into Tanners Lane. Turn left at Pound Lane. Opposite is the Old Rectory, where John Hutchins compiled his *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* in the 18th century. At the end of Pound Lane, on the left, is the town's medieval pound in which stray animals were held. Cross West Street into Streche Road, with West Walls on your right.

Just before Wareham St Mary Primary School turn right into Wareham Common and follow the road past a small parking area. Walk under the by-pass, cross the River Piddle just beyond West Mills and, after passing under the railway bridge, follow the track leading to Ferncroft Farm, ignoring a footpath on the right. Just before the farm outbuildings, cross a small metal footbridge in the hedge on your left and follow the path towards the farmyard and through a gate (not immediately visible) on the left. There are views of the Purbeck hills to the left before the Wareham Forest Way eventually bends round to the right, past South Cottage, climbing steadily until it joins the access drive to Carey House. At the end of the drive, cross a lane and continue to follow the Wareham Forest Way until you reach a crossing path (**SY 903892**). Turn left here, beside the solar farm on Cold Harbour Heath, and after a short section of boardwalk turn right at a T-junction.

Follow this undulating path until you reach the Bere Regis–Wareham road (**SY 896905**). (NB: A short section of the path just before the road is liable to be very muddy after rain.) Turn left at the road and almost immediately right to follow the Wareham Forest Way for another mile, ignoring side paths, until you reach some power lines. Continue ahead, signposted to Woolsbarrow hillfort, and follow the bridlepath waymark pointing straight ahead.

To visit the hillfort, follow the wide track round to the left and then fork right onto a narrower track that leads up to the small Iron Age fort. There are far-reaching views to the east over Morden Park. Take the stony path downhill beside the post marked 'W2' to rejoin the main route.

Soon after, where the Wareham Forest Way turns right, go straight ahead along a bridleway. After one mile, cross the A35 Dorchester–Poole road with care and follow the track past thatched Methodist Lane Cottage and on into East Bloxworth. At the road junction go straight across, signposted 'Winterborne Kingston 3¼'.

About half a mile north of East Bloxworth (**SY 889963**) turn left onto a bridleway (Morden Lane). Where the bridleway meets a road, turn left and immediately right to follow the concrete drive to Butlands Farm. Keeping the farm buildings on your left, turn right uphill at the far end of the farmyard. Look out for Bloxworth House – an early 17th-century house, once almost derelict but now beautifully restored. It was used as Bathsheba Everdene's home in the 1967 film of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

After passing Robinswood Farm, away to the left, where the track turns right at the end of a shelter belt of beech trees (**SY 875957**) go left towards a rusty gate and turn right to join the farm's access drive onto Bloxworth Down, which bears traces of habitation from far back in the past. Cross the busy A31 with care to the far verge and turn left, beyond the hedge, to walk parallel to the main road, turning right immediately before a wooden gate to follow the track known as White Lane. Where it meets a road, go straight across onto a lane leading into the hamlet of Winterborne Muston. Cross the main bed of the Winterborne and continue through the hamlet until you meet the course of a Roman road linking Badbury Rings and Dorchester, where St Edward's Way turns right.

If you plan to break your journey in Winterborne Kingston, turn left here and follow the line of the Roman road until you reach the churchyard of St Nicholas in the village, which marks the end of the first stage of the walk. (NB: A footpath on the left at the north end of Winterborne Muston provides a slightly shorter route to Winterborne Kingston.) To resume the walk retrace your steps along East Street. Not long after passing Abbot's Court Farm the track from Winterborne Muston joins from the right.

Soon after, follow the track round to the left towards Muston Down. Where the track turns right, by a barn, go straight ahead onto a path under trees. Go straight on where the path turns left, ignoring the footpath to Hill Barn. (Alternatively, a wider track runs parallel in the field on the right.) Turn left where the path emerges from the trees, joining the alternative track, and follow the bridleway as it bends right then left before climbing gently towards Charlton Down, with Little Coll Wood ahead to your right.

Before turning left (**ST 871006**) to follow the line of Combs Ditch, look over the gateway ahead of you for a distant view (on a clear day) of Shaftesbury and Melbury Hill. Combs Ditch is a Romano-British fortification dating from the 4th century, which was a secondary defence to Bokerley Dyke designed to defend Dorset against the Saxons. After the path bears right, away from Combs Ditch, take the second

bridleway on the left to enter the woods of the Charisworth Estate and walk down the driveway that leads to the A354 Blandford–Puddletown road (**ST 858019**).

Cross the road with care into a cultivated field and then onto a green lane on Whatcombe Down which for the first 300 yards follows the boundary between the parishes of Winterborne Whitechurch and Charlton Marshall. Follow the bridleway as it bends to the right until it emerges onto a headland, beneath power lines, with a view of the Stour Valley to the east.

Continue northwards along the east side of the boundary hedge until you reach a wood called The Plantation. The route through the wood is a well-defined track that emerges onto a lane, marked on the OS map as Lady Caroline's Drive. After passing a solar farm on the right you come to the Winterborne Stickland–Blandford road (**ST 852051**). Turn left here (beware of traffic as there is no footway) and, shortly after, where the road bends, go through the gate on the left onto a bridleway that follows another old road line down to Winterborne Stickland. Cross the access road to Canada Farm onto a lane that leads you gently down to the village.

Continue through Winterborne Stickland on the road to Okeford Fitzpaine and at the north end of the village leave the road to follow the Jubilee Trail uphill across a field on the right. When you get to the top of the hill you are on the line of another ancient road which used to cross from Ibberton Hill to the west and descend to the Stour about a mile south of Durweston Bridge. Turn right onto this track and follow it until it meets a road by a metal gate. Turn left here to follow the Jubilee Trail past Field Grove House.

*To visit a memorial to 19-year-old Pilot Officer John Frederick Woodward Allen of 152 Squadron, who was killed on 29th November 1940 when his Spitfire crashed into the wood, go left almost immediately after turning right onto the track at the top of the hill (no waymark) to enter the Forestry Commission's Field Grove plantation and take the first path on the left. Follow this round the edge of the wood and, after a sharp turn to the right, look out for the memorial in the trees on the right. Continue east along the path until it rejoins the Jubilee Trail (**ST 833070**) where you turn left.*

The path emerges from the wood onto a wide headland along the edge of first a small and then a larger cultivated field. At the far end of these fields is a lane crossing, an ancient junction of four tracks. On your left is the head of a dry valley, with Turnworth at the bottom. Leave the Jubilee Trail here and keep straight on, heading north between hedges until Bonsley Common Wood is reached. Walk alongside its western edge and, on emerging from the trees, turn right. Continue to walk beside the wood until you come to Bonsley Pond, hidden in the undergrowth on your right.

Go straight across the field, following a grassy track. In the middle of the field you cross another uncultivated track (**ST 825094**), picking up the Wessex Ridgeway which joins from the left. Here you are at about the same height above sea level as Shaftesbury, although the view to the north is obscured by trees.

Continue across the field and enter Eastcombe Wood, which is again Forestry Commission land. Many tracks cross here, but keep to the Wessex Ridgeway and head north. Keep straight ahead into the wood and drop sharply downhill on a track that leads past the old Shillingstone chalk quarry. At the bottom of the hill (**ST 831102**) turn left along a tarmac lane, take the first turning on the right and then pick up the bridleway on the left which follows the west side of a field to a holding area out onto the Blandford–Sturminster Newton road (A357) at Shillingstone. Turn left and walk along the pavement until Hine Town Lane is reached on the right. Cross with care here and follow the lane, turning right at the end to pick up Church Road, which leads directly to the lych gate of Holy Rood Church. Magnificent views of Hambleton Hill can be glimpsed through gateways in the hedge along the lane. This marks the end of the second stage of the walk.

Leave Shillingstone by a kissing gate on the north side of the churchyard and follow a surfaced path north across a field and then down to the old railway station, which has been restored by the North Dorset Railway Trust. The original railway, the old 'Slow and Dirty' (the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway), used to run from the Midland Railway at Bath Queen Square (later Green Park) via Shepton Mallet and Templecombe to the London and South Western Railway at Wimborne, where it connected to Poole and Bournemouth. It was finally closed to passengers in 1966.

You are now on the North Dorset Trailway. Walk along a new short section of path just below the station before resuming the route which leads down to the road crossing below the disused railway bridge. Before leaving the station, glance to your right for yet more views of Hambleton. Leave the Trailway immediately after crossing the road, before Bere Marsh Farm, and cross a stile into the meadow on the right, following a path that leads to a small tributary of the Stour. Pick up the Stour Valley Way (**ST 823123**) and then follow a fenced-in section of path to reach the bridge crossing the Stour itself – the major river of Dorset. From the bridge there is a well-worn path across this open access land to a pedestrian gate. Go through this and follow the Stour Valley Way into Child Okeford.

Just beyond the village war memorial turn right onto the Shaftesbury road and, at Manor Barn, go through a gate on the right and turn left to walk parallel with the road for about 250 yards. Soon after rejoining the road, fork right onto a track that curves round the northern side of Hambleton Hill and up into a small wood. On emerging from the wood, with a rather foreshortened view of Hambleton on your right, turn left (**ST 842133**) and follow the path along the edge of the field downhill to a road. Turn right at the road and immediately left into a large field and follow the line of the hedge round to a point where a footpath joins from the right. Turn left here and walk north-west along the line of the parish boundary between Shroton and Iwerne Minster. Cross over the Child Okeford–Shaftesbury road (**ST 844145**) into another field and follow the left-hand boundary to a lane and thence onto the road. In the lane you pass on your right a beautiful old farmhouse and yard, Church Farm, which dates from the 17th century.

Continue north along the road through Farrington, passing Applin's Farm on your left. Cross Fontmell Brook by Farrington Bridge and, after about 500 yards, turn onto a bridleway on the right, opposite a bungalow (**ST 841161**). The bridleway passes Roehill before bending round to the right. Keep to the left-hand side of the hedge, passing Penhill Copse on your left as the bridleway gradually climbs towards the Shaftesbury road at the top of the hill.

From the top of Pen Hill there is a view both ways. Ahead you can see Fontmell Magna and Fontmell Down – bought by the National Trust in 1977 to commemorate Thomas Hardy – and Melbury Hill on the left. Looking back you get a splendid view of Hambledon and can also see the Bulbarrow ridge and probably Nettlecombe Tout, Lyscombe Hill above Plush, and Bladeley Hill above Buckland Newton. You can also, of course, see right across the Blackmore Vale.

Turn left onto the road and follow this north for about half a mile until you come to Bedchester. Continue along the road for another half a mile, with Melbury Hill again visible on your right, and take the first turning on the right, Hawkcombe Lane. You soon come to a lane on the left, with a 'No Through Road' sign (Drones Lane), into which you turn. Where it bears right (**ST 861188**) go through the gate on the left and almost immediately turn right on a path through the hedge. Cross the middle of the field, heading towards Budden's Farm visible ahead, and then go over a stile in the trees to cross a wooden footbridge over Twyford Brook. The path then climbs gently towards the farm. Bear right soon after, keeping the farm outbuildings on your left, before emerging onto a lane.

Turn right here and, about 200 yards later, turn left into a field, following the line of the right-hand hedge across two fields. Leave the second field in the far right-hand corner, following a waymarked track round to the farmyard at Allan's Farm and then along the access drive, with views of Duncliffe Wood to your left. Turning right onto Pitts Lane, continue past Writh Farm and turn left at the crossroads by Cornhill Cottage. As you leave Cornhill crossroads, going north, you enter French Mill Lane.

Halfway up the other side of the valley, at 'Three Ways' junction, take the left-hand fork. Climb gradually for about three-quarters of a mile until you come to Holyrood Farm on your left and, just beyond it, a track running left between hedges. Turn onto this and follow it round a gentle curve to a T-junction. Here turn left onto a stony track, which shortly afterwards becomes an asphalt lane (Kingsman Lane) climbing up to Shaftesbury. On the last stretch you can see the steep earth ramparts up to the Abbey looming above you.

At the top of the lane emerge into St James's Street and turn right. After a few yards, turn left up Gold Hill, famous as the setting for Ridley Scott's iconic 'Hovis' advertisement of 1973, with the much restored Abbey Wall on the left-hand side. Note the huge buttresses to hold back the wall, and the bedrock on which they are based. The Town Hall at the top of Gold Hill, built in 1826-7, was financed by the Grosvenor family to replace the old Market Hall that stood in the middle of the High Street. The basement entrances were originally barred and were in fact lock-ups for

disorderly persons. One space was reserved for the Town Fire Engine – this can be seen in Gold Hill Museum (on your right). Above you, to your right, is St Peter's Church, beautifully restored and well worth a visit.

Turn left at the top of Gold Hill onto Park Walk, where the length of the wall on your right gives you some idea of the extent of the Abbey Church. St Edward's Way finishes at the entrance to the Abbey Museum on Park Walk.