

Digital Editions

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Guide to Rural England

SOMERSET



WHERE TO GO | WHAT TO SEE | WHAT TO DO
WHERE TO STAY | WHERE TO EAT | WHERE TO BUY

Fully illustrated with detailed directions and maps

LOCATOR MAP



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Somerset

Was Cadbury Castle really King Arthur's Camelot? Did Joseph of Arimathea really walk through England's green and pleasant land to plant a thorn from Christ's crown of thorns at Glastonbury, where it blossomed once a year on the day of Christ's resurrection? Was it really at Athelney that King Alfred, deep in thought, allowed the cakes to burn? Myth and legend seem to be as integral to Somerset as its cider orchards and Cheddar cheese, its free-roaming ponies on Exmoor and the oldest pubs with their skittle alleys.

Many literary luminaries found inspiration here. Exmoor provided the setting for RD Blackmore's great historical romance *Lorna Doone*; Wordsworth and Coleridge both lived in the county for several years and it was during their countless walks over the Somerset hills that they fashioned their *Lyrical Ballads*, a new kind of plain speaking verse that inspired the Romantic Revolution. Tennyson was a frequent visitor to the county and it was for his Clevedon friend, Arthur Hallam, that he spent 17 years perfecting his great lyrical poem *In Memoriam*.

Hallam was a member of the Elton family whose great house, Clevedon Court, is just one of many fine mansions within the county borders. Others include the late-medieval stone manor house of Lytes Cary, the Palladian Hatch Court and the exquisite Montacute House, built in the late 16th century for Elizabeth I's Master of the Rolls. The fine houses are sometimes overshadowed by their gardens. There are some splendid examples here, particularly those, such as Barrington Court, Hestercombe Gardens and Tintinhull House Gardens, that were planted, or

influenced by, the early 20th-century landscape gardener, Gertrude Jekyll.

A wealth of prehistoric remains have been found within the county, but two of the area's most popular and famous attractions are both natural – Cheddar Gorge and the caves at Wookey Hole. With cliffs over 400 feet high on either side of the road that runs through the bottom of the gorge, Cheddar is indeed a spectacular sight, while the caves at Wookey Hole, from which the River Axe emerges, are famous for their echos and for their fantastic stalagmite and stalactite formations.

Somerset also contains the smallest city in England, Wells. It is also one of the country's most delightful cities, clustered around its superb cathedral. This magnificent building boasts a truly wonderful Astronomical Clock, which was installed in the 14th century and is still functioning perfectly.

To the north of the Mendip Hills lies the city of Bath, which in the 18th century became the most fashionable spa town in the country. Some 1600 years earlier, it was equally fashionable among the Romans. Close by is the West Country's largest city, Bristol, Sir John Betjeman's favourite English city, which, he asserted, had "the finest architectural heritage of any city outside London".



Somerset Levels near Othry

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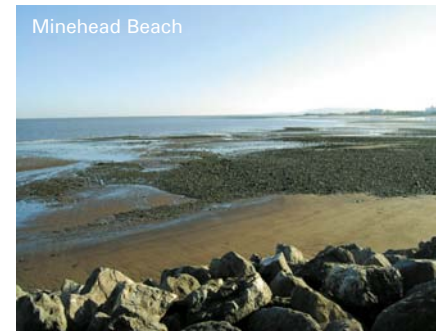
Minehead

North Hill Nature Reserve

West Somerset Railway

Award-winning floral displays and gardens, a tree-lined avenue leading to a recently constructed promenade and a sandy beach, a wide range of shops, pubs, restaurants and open-air cafés, and an extensive choice of family attractions and amusements – Minehead has everything you expect of a successful English seaside resort. There are still thatched cottages in the picturesque Higher Town, and the unspoilt acres of the Exmoor National Park stretch away to the west and south.

Despite sounding like a product of the industrial age, Minehead is an attractive and



popular seaside town, lying at the foot of the wooded promontory known as North Hill. It is one of the oldest settlements in Somerset. A busy Bristol Channel port since the time of the Celts, the old harbour lies in the lee of North Hill, making it one of the safest landing places in the West Country. At one time, ships

FAVOURITE THINGS – JEWELLERY & GIFTS

47 The Avenue, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5BB

Tel: 01643 709403

e-mail: sally.chilton@virgin.net

website: www.favouritethingsonline.co.uk



On Minehead's tree-lined main shopping street, **Favourite Things** sells a wide range of contemporary jewellery, things to wear, things for the home and gifts for any occasion. Owner Sally Chilton ensures that shopping is fun with her fun and funky jewellery, some glass, some beaded, some made of porcelain and some in classic silver. Among the other best-sellers are beaded bags, pashminas, scarves, decorative glass, wooden toys and puzzles, scented candles, soaps, crystals and many local and fair trade products. Shop hours are 10.30 to 5.30 Monday to Saturday and 11 to 4 on Sunday. Everything in stock here can also be ordered online.

GERALD DAVID & FAMILY

3 Park Street, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5NQ

Tel 01643 702843

website: www.geraldldavid.co.uk



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West Somerset Railway, The Railway Station, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5BG
Tel: 01643 704996 www.West-Somerset-Railway.co.uk

arrived here with wool and livestock from Ireland, crops from the plantations of Virginia, coal from the South Wales valleys and day trippers from Cardiff and Bristol. The merchants and paddle steamers have gone and nowadays the harbour is the peaceful haunt of sailing dinghies and pleasure craft.

There is a good view of the old port from the **North Hill Nature Reserve**, and a three-mile-walk starting near the lifeboat station on the harbour side is an excellent way to explore this area of Minehead and its surroundings. The 14th-century parish Church of St Michael stands in a prominent position below North Hill. For centuries, a light was kept burning in its tower to help guide ships into the harbour. Inside, the church contains a number of unusual features, including a rare medieval prayer book, or missal, which once belonged to Richard Fitzjames, a local vicar who went on

to become Bishop of London in 1506.

The decline of Minehead as a port was offset by its gradual expansion as a seaside resort and the town went to great lengths to attract a suitably genteel clientele. So much so, in fact, that there was a local bylaw in force until 1890 that forbade anyone over 10 years of age from swimming in the sea "except from a bathing machine, tent or other effective screen". The arrival of the railway in 1874 failed to trigger the rapid expansion experienced by some other seaside resorts. Nevertheless, during World War One, Minehead was able to provide an escape from the ravages of war at timeless establishments like the Strand Hotel, where guests were entertained by such stars as Anna Pavlova and Gladys Cooper.

Changes to Minehead over the years have been gradual, but the most momentous change came in 1962 when Billy Butlin opened a

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STUART LOWEN FARM SHOP

4B Hawksworth Road, Minehead, Somerset TA24 5BZ
Tel: 01643 706034
e-mail: stuart.lowen@live.com
website: www.stuartlowen.co.uk



Located next door to Tesco on the A39 seafront road just outside Minehead, the **Stuart Lowen Farm Shop** specialises in top quality local meat and poultry. Stuart is a qualified butcher and rears his own lambs on 17 acres at nearby Hopcott. The shop also sells a superb range of sausages, local fresh vegetables, some excellent cheese, local home-made cakes, ready made meals and ice cream from Styles of Rodhuish. The shop offers free local delivery and the produce is also available by mail through the website.

holiday camp at the eastern end of the esplanade. Now updated, this popular attraction has done much to transform present-day Minehead into an all-round family resort.

The town is also the northern terminus of the **West Somerset Railway** (see panel opposite), the privately-owned steam railway that runs for 20 miles between the resort and Bishop's Lydeard, just northwest of Taunton. Vintage locomotives up to 80 years old trundle along the route that follows the coast as far as Blue Anchor, which has a station next to the beach and a small Great Western Railway museum, then on to Watchet, which has a Victorian station with a small gift shop. The route then turns inland and travels through peaceful countryside to Bishop's Lydeard.

were in fact built in the 19th century by the local lord of the manor to provide housing for his estate workers.

Just to the northwest of the village rises Selworthy Beacon, one of the highest points on the vast **Holnicote Estate**. Covering some 12,500 acres of Exmoor National Park, the estate includes a four-mile stretch of coastline between Minehead and Porlock Weir. There are few estates in the country that offer such a variety of landscape. There are north-facing cliffs along the coast, traditional villages and hamlets of cottages and farms and the **Horner and Dunkery National Nature Reserve** where Dunkery Beacon, the highest point on Exmoor, rises to 1700 feet. Virtually the full length of the Horner Water lies within the estate, from its source on the high

Around Minehead

SELWORTHY

3 miles W of Minehead off the A39

-  Holnicote Estate
-  Horner & Dunkery National Nature Reserve
-  Allerford Museum

This picturesque and much photographed village is situated on the side of a wooded hill. Its cob and thatch cottages look timeless, but



moorland to the sea at Bossington Beach, one of the best examples of a shingle storm beach in the country. The whole area is noted for its diversity of wildlife and the many rare plant species to be found.

This National Trust-owned estate has more than 100 miles of footpaths through fields, moors and villages for walkers to enjoy. The South West Coast Path curves inland at Hurlstone Point to avoid landslips in the soft Foreland sandstone. West of this model village is another estate village, Allerford, which has an elegant twin-arched packhorse bridge. In Allerford's old school is a **Museum** dedicated to the rural life of West Somerset. Among its many imaginatively presented displays are a Victorian kitchen, a laundry and dairy, and an old school room complete with desks, books and children's toys. The museum also houses the ever-growing West Somerset Photographic

Archive covering most villages and hamlets in the area from late Victorian times.

PORLOCK

7 miles W of Minehead off the A39

Dovery Manor Porlock Hill

Coleridge Way

An ancient settlement once frequented by Saxon kings, in recent decades Porlock has become a popular riding and holiday centre. The charming village is filled with lovely old buildings, most notably the 15th-century **Doverly Manor** (now a museum) with its striking traceried hall window, and the largely 13th-century parish church that lost the top section of its spire during a thunderstorm in the 17th century. Porlock has the feel of a community at the end of the world as it lies at the foot of **Porlock Hill**, a notorious incline

HARTSHANGER EXMOOR HOLIDAYS VB****

Toll Road, Porlock, Somerset TA24 8JH

Tel: 01643 862700

e-mail: hartshanger@lineone.net

website: www.hartshanger.com

Hartshanger Exmoor Holidays is based in a handsome Edwardian villa set above the village of Porlock in the heart of Exmoor National Park. Alanna Edward and her family offer self-catering accommodation in two beautifully appointed flats with beams, sloping ceilings and patchwork quilts. High Hanger, with a double and a twin bedroom, is on the top floor of the main house, while Little Hanger, with three bedrooms, is located in the coach house. Both flats have a fully equipped kitchen, comfortable sitting room, hairdryer, ironing facilities, TV with video/DVD and radio-alarm. Wi-Fi is available.

It's a lovely, quiet place to stay, with five acres of gardens and grounds (including an all-weather tennis court) and glorious views over Porlock Bay and the Bristol Channel across to Wales, and the loudest noises guests are likely to hear are the surf and the seabirds. The shops and pubs and restaurants of Porlock are a short walk away, and there are facilities nearby for sea and river fishing, horse riding and cycling – for guests who bring their own bikes Hartshanger has secure storage and a washing down area.



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DETAILS FOR THE HOME

1 Lowerbourne House, High Street, Porlock, Somerset TA24 8PT

Tel: 01643 863511

e-mail: detailsforthehome@talktalkbusiness.net

Details for the Home was established in 2006. The owners have a passionate interest in interior decoration and have gathered together an eclectic selection of unusual and intriguing items. All of them are practical and useful and are sold at very reasonable prices.

Amongst the furniture items are dressers and cupboards in soft tones of white, cream or grey. There's also a range of mirrors and clocks, kitchenware, picture frames, candleholders, vases, and much, much more. Fabrics include tablecloths, napkins, cushions and throws.

The shop's reputation has spread far and wide, with visitors from London and the Home Counties, and it also has a loyal following among local people.



CHURCHGATE GALLERY

High Street, Porlock, Somerset TA24 8PT

Tel: 01643 802238

website: www.churchgategallery.co.uk

Will and Rachel Rayner opened their first gallery in Minehead in 1988 and in the summer of 2010 they opened the **Churchgate Gallery** on Porlock's main street.

The Gallery, which is open daily from 11am, displays a large and eclectic selection of original paintings in oils, pastels and watercolours, original prints and etchings, limited edition prints, photography, jewellery, books and artist greetings cards. Many of the pieces are inspired by the local coast and countryside. The excellent website includes details of some of the artists currently shown.

The Gallery also offers high-quality framing and giclée printing services, which are offered, with similar high standards, at the sister company Courtyard Farming & Gallery in Friday Street, Minehead. Tel: 01643 705648.



GLEN LODGE COUNTRY HOUSE

Hawkecombe, Porlock, Somerset TA24 8LN

Tel: 01643 863371 Fax: 01643 863016

e-mail: glenlodge@gmail.com

website: www.glenlodge.net

Beautifully located overlooking Porlock bay, set within 21 lovely acres of woodland and lush landscaped gardens, **Glen Lodge Country House** is the perfect location for your escape to the countryside. Glen Lodge is perfectly situated for walking to and around Exmoor, bird watching, exploring the northern Somerset and Devon countryside, relaxing on one of the nearby beaches, or just staying around its gardens to unwind. A short walk from the house takes you to the centre of Porlock with unique local shops, pubs, museums, galleries and restaurants.

The accommodation is, as you would expect, elegant and kept to the highest standard; each room has been individually decorated and has its own unique character. Of the five rooms in the Hotel, three are en-suite and two have private bathrooms, and all have fabulous views of either the stunning coastline or the lovely sprawling acres of garden. The owners, who have lived here for five years, are wonderful hosts, and always endeavour to do their utmost to cater for all of their guests. This is reflected in the breakfast included with your stay, which has such a huge variety there will be something for any taste; you can have the traditional full English, waffles, pancakes, muffins, or soufflés, as well as a whole spread of fresh fruit, cereals and yogurts all organic, freshly cooked, and locally sourced where possible.



where the road rises 1350 feet in less than three miles, with a gradient of 1 in 4 in places.

Porlock lies at the western end of the **Coleridge Way**, a 36-mile-long walk that takes in some of the county's most beautiful landscapes and ends at Nether Stowey, one-time home of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was a passionate walker and once walked from Nether Stowey to Porlock in a day. Most modern day walkers allow three to four days.

PORLOCK WEIR

9 miles W of Minehead off the A39

Doverhay Garage

Porlock Weir Marine Aquariums

Exmoor Glass Submerged Forest

Culborne Church

Today, this hamlet has a small tide-affected

harbour full of fishing boats and yachts but Porlock Weir was once an important seaport. The Danes sacked it on a number of occasions in the 10th century. In 1052, Harold, the future king of England, landed here from Ireland to begin a short-lived career that ended at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. A pleasant and picturesque place, Porlock Weir offers a number of interesting



Porlock Weir

historic building museum and heritage historic site scenic attraction flora and fauna

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NO. 7 HARBOUR STUDIOS

Porlock Weir, nr Minehead, Somerset TA24 8P

Tel: 01643 862468

e-mail: no7pashminas@hotmail.co.uk

Located opposite Porlock Weir's attractive harbour, No7 invites you into a den of delights. The air is gently scented from the range of Branche d'Olive soaps, candles, room diffusers and much more made in the South of France.

Your eye alights on the display of hand picked Pashminas, woven and embroidered by hand in Kashmir in an enticing palette of colours and designs.

There is an unusual selection of cushion covers and bedspreads

– from fine organza backed cutwork, sumptuous silks to richly textured Khambardia patched pieces. Arrays of wall panels decorate the walls along with cushion covers and hangings made from antique textiles interspersed with a few tribal artefacts.

Quality and beauty are the prime objective in this small space and you are always assured of finding something different.



attractions, including a 100-year-old garage, **Doverhay Garage**, which is now a museum displaying vintage cars and motoring memorabilia. **Porlock Weir Marine Aquariums**, opened in 2009, celebrates the variety of marine life to be found in and along the shores of the Bristol Channel.

Visitors can watch flounder, bass, blennies and various kinds of wrasse in the numerous tanks, and spot turbot and rays and many other species in the large open pool. And at **Exmoor Glass** you can purchase items in its Cranberry Range glassware made in the traditional manner, as well as jewellery and other goods. A short distance offshore from Porlock weir is a **Submerged Forest**, a relic of the Ice Age that can be seen at low tide.

From Porlock Weir an attractive one-and-a-half-mile walk leads up through walnut and oak trees to **Culbone Church**, arguably the

smallest church in regular use in England, and certainly one of the most picturesque. A true hidden treasure, measuring only 33 feet by 14 feet, this superb part-Norman building is set in a wooded combe that once supported a small charcoal burning community, and was at other times home to French prisoners and lepers.

OARE

11 miles W of Minehead off the A39

RD Blackmore

Set deep in a secluded valley, Oare is one of the highlights for pilgrims following the Lorna Doone Trail. According to **RD Blackmore's** novel, it was in the narrow little 15th-century church here that his heroine was shot at the wedding altar by the villainous Carver Doone. Blackmore knew the church well since his grandfather was rector here in the mid 1800s.

stories and anecdotes famous people art and craft entertainment and sport walks

EMMETT'S GRANGE COUNTRY HOUSE ACCOMMODATION

Simonsbath, Exmoor National Park, Somerset TA24 7LD

Tel: 01643 831138 Fax: 01643 831093

e-mail: mail@emmettgrange.co.uk

website: www.emmettgrange.co.uk

Emmett's Grange offers quiet, comfortable accommodation in an oasis of friendly civilisation amid the glorious Exmoor National Park scenery on the Somerset-Devon border. The graceful Georgian-style house stands southwest of Simonsbath at the end of a half-mile private drive, set in its own 900-acre estate. The house has five beautifully decorated and furnished en suite guest bedrooms – doubles, twins and a family room. Each has its own particular charm and character: one has a super-king size bed with an additional single bed, another has a splendid antique four-poster. One room, the Linhay, a small barn conversion with a kitchen and eating area, can be booked on a B&B or self-catering basis.

Owners Tom and Lucy love cooking, and the breakfast here is definitely not to be missed. For those opting for an evening meal, breakfast is the time to discuss Tom's excellent four-course dinners, which often feature superb local produce including seafood, Red Devon beef and seasonal game. Guests have the use of three day rooms – a drawing room for drink and a chat, a library for a quiet read or gentle study and a morning room where guests can practise their skills on the Steinway – as well as the run of the lovely lawns, gardens and grounds. Emmett's Grange is an ideal base for touring, walking (the Two Moors Way and the Tarka Trail both pass nearby), cycling, riding, fishing – or just relaxing. Tom and Lucy can arrange hunting, shooting and fishing trips.



A placard inside the church indicates the most likely window used by Carver Doone to fire the shot that almost proved fatal to the novel's heroine, and a memorial to the author is set into the wall of the church beside the south door.

across the River Barle. It's a mystery where the stones slabs came from since there are no similar rocks anywhere near. Geologists believe they were probably left here by retreating glaciers at the close of the Ice Age.

LISCOMBE

13 miles SW of Minehead off the B3223

Tarr Steps

Just west of the moorland village of Liscombe is an extraordinary survival from prehistoric times. **Tarr Steps** is the longest clapper bridge anywhere in the world, its huge stone slabs supported by low stone pillars extending 180 feet



WINSFORD

7 miles S of Minehead off the A396

One of the prettiest villages in Exmoor, with picturesque thatched cottages, a ford and no fewer than seven bridges, including an old packhorse bridge. On a rise to the west of the village stands the medieval church with a handsome tall tower that dominates both the village and the surrounding area. This idyllic spot was the birthplace of the firebrand Ernest Bevin, founder of the Transport & General Workers Union, World War Two statesman and Foreign Secretary in the post-war Labour government.

DULVERTON

12 miles S of Minehead on the B3222

Guildhall Heritage & Arts Centre

Exmoor Pony Centre

Dulverton is a lively little town set in the wooded valley of the River Barle on the southern edge of Exmoor. Small though it is, the town boasts a surprising variety of attractions and in recent years has come to challenge Dunster in popularity. The Exmoor National Park has an excellent Visitor Centre here, housed in what used to be the local workhouse. Close by is the **Guildhall Heritage & Arts Centre**, which has displays on Dulverton's history over the past century

and is also home to the Exmoor Photographic Archive, which stages special exhibitions throughout the year. An integral part of the centre is Granny Baker's Cottage with its authentic Victorian kitchen. There's also a gallery that provides a showcase for the work of local artists and craftspeople. The Centre is open from mid April to the beginning of November.

It's a pleasure to stroll around the town with its ancient bridge, traditional hostellers, cosy tearoom and family-run shops selling anything from antiquarian books to country clothing, gifts to old-fashioned fish and chips. Regular community markets offer a wide range of local crafts, while the highlights of the year in Dulverton are the Carnival, held on the first Saturday in October, and Dulverton by Starlight on the first Sunday in December.

Just outside Dulverton, at Ashwick, the **Exmoor Pony Centre** offers rides on these sturdy little beasts. Because of their size, the rider's weight is restricted to 76kg.

DUNSTER

2 miles SE of Minehead on the A396

Dunster Castle Dunster Working Watermill
Dunster Priory Luttrell Arms Dovecote
Church of St George

Although Dunster is one of the most popular

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of Exmoor's villages, this ancient settlement is also one of the least typical as it lies in the fertile valley of the River Avill. No visitor will be surprised to learn that this landscape inspired Mrs Alexander to compose the hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The village is dominated by **Dunster Castle** standing outside the village on the top of the wooded Conygar Hill. Founded by William de Mohun on this natural promontory above the River Avill, just a few years before the Domesday Book was completed in 1089, the castle passed into the hands of the Luttrell family in 1379. It remained in that family until it was given to the National Trust in 1976 by Lt Col GWF Luttrell. The medieval castle was remodelled in 1617 by William Arnold. During the English Civil War, Dunster Castle was one of the last Royalist strongholds in the West



Dunster Castle

Country to fall. The garrison only surrendered after a siege lasting 160 days. While several Jacobean interiors have survived, the castle underwent major alterations during the latter part of the 17th century. Some of the finest features date from that period, in particular the superb plasterwork in the dining room and the magnificent balustraded main staircase

THE DUNSTER CASTLE HOTEL

Exmoor National Park, Dunster, Somerset TA24 6SF
Tel: 01643 823030

e-mail: thedunstercastlehotel@googlemail.com
website: www.dunstercastlehotel.co.uk

The **Dunster Castle Hotel** offers contemporary style with traditional comfort at the foot of the historic National Trust property Dunster Castle, in the Exmoor National Park. The hotel building, with its medieval cobblestone pavement, dates back to about 1750 and was once the home of the outgoing dowager of Dunster Castle. The hotel has recently been fully refurbished to a very fine standard and the owners are highly proud of their accommodation; eight luxury en-suite bedrooms each individually designed by 'jennyd interiors' to reflect the understated elegance that runs throughout the hotel.

A stay of at least 2 to 3 nights is essential to really enjoy the area and relax in style. The beautiful Exmoor National Parkland and West Somerset railway are only ten minutes drive away, and the coast is only half a mile from the town. Horse riding, shooting and safaris can be organised for you by the hotel and, of course, you can visit the Castle which is almost next door. You can also enjoy a drink or dine in the fabulous Cellar Bar or Squires Brasserie, both of which serve the finest food prepared from local fresh produce wherever possible.



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THE CROOKED WINDOW GALLERY

7 High Street, Dunster, Somerset TA24 6SF

Tel: 01643 821606

e-mail: bob.ricketts@tiscali.co.uk

website: www.thecrookedwindow.co.uk

Opening Times:

Mon-Sat 10.30am-5.30pm

Sunday variable - please enquire

Other times by appointment

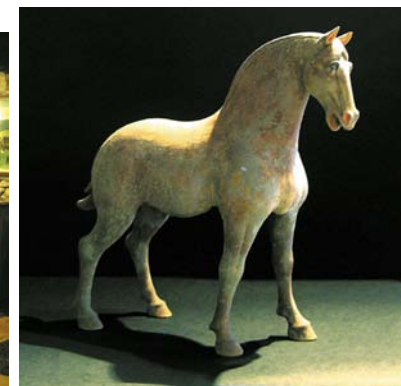


The **Crooked Window Gallery** is situated in Dunster's picturesque High Street and is so named because the movement in its timber framed construction has caused one of the shops bay windows to become distorted and bowed. The building dates from the 15th century and is unusual for its decorative 18th century plasterwork, or 'pargeting', a feature quite untypical of this area.

The gallery is owned and run by Robert Ricketts. Robert buys, sells, collects and lectures on antiques. You might be surprised to find an impressive collection of ancient Chinese ceramics - not normally seen outside London.

Robert also stocks a good selection of quality gemstones from which he designs and makes his own jewellery in a choice of precious metals. Why not commission your own piece of unique jewellery for that special occasion. He can also alter or repair your existing jewellery.

Within the atmospheric interior you will find an exciting range of jewellery in gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones. There are quality crafts from other artists as well as interesting and unusual antique items - all eminently suitable as gifts.





with its delicately carved flora and fauna. However, the overall medieval character of the exterior of the present day castle is due to restoration work undertaken by Anthony Salvin in the 1860s when the castle was transformed into a comfortable and opulent country mansion. The steeply terraced gardens with their striking collection of rare shrubs and subtropical plants were also laid out around this time, and the castle and gardens are surrounded by a 28-acre deer park through which there are several footpaths, as well as the Arbutus Walk through the National Collection of strawberry trees.

The parkland of Dunster Castle is also home to another National Trust property, **Dunster Working Watermill**, built in the 18th century on the site of a pre-Norman mill. Now restored to working order, the mill, which is run as a private business, has a shop selling mill flour, muesli and mill souvenirs. There's also a tearoom by the riverside.

Remnants of the ancient feudal settlement that grew up in the shelter of the castle can still be seen in the village today, particularly in the wide main street. At the north end of this street stands a small octagonal building, the former Yarn Market. This was erected by the Luttrells in the early 17th century when the village was an important cloth trading centre. Such was

Dunster's influence in this trade that a type of woollen cloth, renowned for its quality and strength, bears the village's name. The nearby **Luttrell Arms** was converted from a private residence into an inn in the mid 1600s. Distinguished by its fine 15th-century porch, the inn is one of the few places in the country where the once common custom of burning the ashen faggot is still observed. On Christmas Eve, the faggot, a bundle of 12 ash branches bound with green ash bands, is burnt in the inn's great fireplace. As each band burns through, another round of hot punch is ordered from the bar. While the ash is burning, the company sings the ancient Dunster Carol and when the faggot is finally consumed, a charred remnant is taken from the embers ready to light the following year's fire.

The inn once belonged to Cleeve Abbey, while the village's principal religious house, **Dunster Priory**, was an outpost of Bath Abbey. Now largely demolished, the only parts of the priory to survive are the splendid priory church and an unusual 12th-century **dovecote** that can be seen in a nearby garden. It has a revolving wooden ladder inside, which gave access to the 500 nesting boxes and their eggs. The squabs, or fledgling doves, provided a staple element of the medieval monk's diet. The priory **Church of St George**, rebuilt by the monks in a rose pink sandstone as early as 1100, is one of the most impressive of Somerset's parish churches. The church tower was added in the 15th century but its most outstanding feature is undoubtedly the fan-vaulted rood screen that extends across the nave and aisles. At 54 feet it is the longest in England and was built in 1498 after a squabble between the priory and the townspeople. The magnificent screen served to separate the monk's choir from the parish church.

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On the southern edge of the village, the ancient Gallox Bridge, a medieval packhorse bridge, spans the River Avill.

CARHAMPTON

3 miles SE of Minehead on the A39

Madam Carne

A small inland village that was the site of a Viking victory in the 9th century. Carhampton's original village church was named after St Carantoc, an early Celtic missionary from across the Bristol Channel. He is reputed to have chosen this site for his ministry by throwing his stone altar overboard and following it to shore. The present church building, though much restored, contains a remarkable 15th-century painted screen that extends across the entire church. The old inn, near the churchyard lych gate, has the date 1638 set into its cobbled floor in sheep's knuckle bones.

Each January, the residents of Carhampton

re-enact the ancient custom of wassailing the apple trees. A toast is made to the most productive apple tree in the district and cider is poured on to its trunk in a charming ceremony that probably has pagan origins.

Local folklore tells of a mysterious woman from the village, **Madam Carne**, who died in 1612 having done away with three husbands. According to legend, her ghost returned home after her funeral to prepare breakfast for the mourners.

WASHFORD

6 miles SE of Minehead on the A39

Cleeve Abbey Tropi-quaria

Radio Museum

This village is spread out across Vallis Florida, the flowery valley dedicated to Our Blessed Lady of the Cliff. Washford is dominated by **Cleeve Abbey** (see panel below), the only monastery in Somerset that belonged to the austere Cistercian order founded in 1198 by

Cleeve Abbey

Washford, Somerset TA23 0PS

Tel: 01984 640377

website: www.english-heritage.org.uk

On 25th June 1198 the new Abbey of Cleeve was founded, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and originally named Vallis Florida or Vale of Flowers. Since then the Black Death, the dissolution of the monasteries, destruction of the Abbey Church and use as a farmhouse, have all played a part in the 800 year history of Cleeve Abbey. Today, it survives as a haven of peace and tranquillity, one of the undiscovered jewels of Somerset boasting magnificent architecture and hidden treasures.

Some of the finest cloister buildings in England can be seen including the magnificent 15th century timber roof in the refectory with its exquisite carved angels, the unique medieval wall paintings of the Painted Chamber and the heraldic tile pavements. One of the greatest pleasures however is to explore the numerous nooks and crannies, which reveal hidden carvings and paintings, from the hands of craftsmen long ago.



the Earl of Lincoln. This abbey is fortunate in that it was not allowed to fall into disrepair after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 like many great monastic houses. The cloister buildings at Cleeve were put to domestic use and they are now among the most complete in the country. Although the cruciform abbey church has been reduced to its foundations, the refectory, chapter house, monks' common room, dormitory and cloisters remain. Most impressive of all is the great hall, a magnificent building with tall windows, a wagon roof decorated with busts of crowned angels and medieval murals, and a unique set of floor tiles with heraldic symbols. The curved dormitory staircase has particularly fine archways and mullion windows, while the combined gatehouse and almonry, the last building to be constructed before the Dissolution, makes an imposing entrance to the abbey precinct.

A short distance northeast of the village is a more recent attraction, **Tropiquaria**, a wildlife park featuring a wide range of tropical animals. There is an aquarium here as well as an aviary and visitors are offered the chance to stroke snakes, tickle tarantulas and to get in touch with their wilder side. Children can swarm over the full-size pirate ships or work off some energy in the indoor play castle; grown-ups may be more interested in the **Radio Museum**, which is housed within an old radio transmitting station. There are hundreds of vintage radios to look at as well as a wealth of other radio memorabilia

WATCHET

7 miles SE of Minehead on the B3191

 Florence Wyndham

Once a busy industrial port, Watchet is now a thriving marina for yachts and boats. It was



from Watchet that Coleridge's imaginary crew set sail in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the epic poem written while the poet was staying at nearby Nether Stowey. A statue of the Ancient Mariner himself stands on the promenade.

The scale of Watchet's parish church reflects the town's long-standing importance and prosperity. It is set well back from the town centre and contains several fine tombs belonging to the Wyndham family, the local lords of the manor who did much to develop the potential of the port. There is a local story that suggests that one 16th century member of the family, **Florence Wyndham**, had to be buried twice. The day after her first funeral the church sexton went down into church vaults secretly to remove a ring from her finger. When the coffin was opened, the old woman suddenly awoke. In recent years, the town has become something of a coastal resort and one of its attractions is the small museum dedicated to local maritime history.

WILLITON

7 miles SE of Minehead on the A39/A358

 Bakelite Museum

The large village of Williton was once a Saxon royal estate. During the 12th century

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the manor was the home of Sir Reginald FitzUrse, one of the knights who murdered Thomas à Becket. To atone for his terrible crime, Sir Reginald gave half the manor to the Knights Templar.

The village today is the home of the diesel locomotive workshops of the West Somerset Railway and the **Bakelite Museum**, a fascinating place providing a nostalgic look at the 'pioneer of plastics'. Housed within an historic watermill, the museum displays the largest collection of vintage plastics in Britain, with thousands of quirky and rare items, including spy cameras, monstrous perming machines and even a Bakelite coffin.

MONKSILVER

8 miles SE of Minehead on the B3188

 Combe Sydenham Hall  Drake's Cannonball

 Nettlecombe Court  Brendon Hills

This pretty village of charming old houses and thatched cottages has, in its churchyard, the graves of Elizabeth Conibeer and her two middle-aged daughters, Anne and Sarah, who were murdered in June 1775 in the nearby hamlet of Woodford. Their tombstone bears a message to the unidentified murderer:

*Inhuman wretch, whoe'er thou art
That didst commit this horrid crime,
Repent before thou dost depart
To meet thy awful Judge Divine.*

Just to the south of the village is a particularly handsome manor house, **Combe Sydenham Hall**, built in the middle of the reign of Elizabeth I by George Sydenham on the site of a monastic settlement. Above the entrance, there is a Latin inscription that translates as; This door of George's is always open except to ungrateful souls. This was also

the home of Elizabeth Sydenham, George's daughter, who was to become the second wife of Sir Francis Drake. After becoming engaged, Sir Francis left his fiancée to go off looting for Spanish gold. Elizabeth grew so weary waiting for her betrothed to return that she resolved to marry another gentleman. According to local stories, she was on her way to the church, when a meteorite flew out of the sky and smashed into the ground in front of her. Taking this as a sign that she should wait for Sir Francis she called off the wedding and, eventually, the couple were reunited. The meteorite, now known as **Drake's Cannonball**, is on display in the great hall; it is said to bring good luck to those who touch it. The 500-acre grounds around the hall have been designated a country park and they contain a working corn mill complete with waterwheel, a herb garden, a peacock house and a herd of fallow deer. The estate also incorporates a modern trout farm that stands on the site of a fully restored Tudor trout hatchery dating from the end of the 16th century.

A mile or so to the west stands another ancient manor, **Nettlecombe Court**, once the home of the Raleigh family, relations of another great Elizabethan seafarer, Sir Walter



Combe Sydenham, Monksilver

Raleigh. Later, the manor passed by marriage to the Cornish Trevelyan family and it is now a field studies centre open only by appointment.

To the southwest of the village are the **Brendon Hills**, the upland area within the Exmoor National Park from where, in the mid 19th century, iron ore was mined in significant quantities. The ore was then carried down a steep mineral railway to the coast for shipment to the furnaces of South Wales. At one time the Ebbw Vale Company employed almost 1000 miners here. The company was a strictly Nonconformist concern and imposed a rigorous teetotal regime on its workers. Those wanting a drink had to walk across the moor all the way to Raleigh's Cross. The company also founded a miners' settlement with a temperance hotel and three chapels that became renowned for the achievements of its choir and fife and drum band. Those walking the slopes of the hills can still see sections of the old mineral railway. A two-mile stretch of the track bed leading down to the coast at Watchet is now a pleasant footpath.

EAST QUANTOXHEAD

11 miles SE of Minehead off the A39

 Trendle Ring  Beacon Hill

From the village there is a pleasant walk to the southeast, to Kilve, where the ruins of a medieval chantry, or college of priests, can be found. From here a track can be taken from the churchyard down to a boulder-strewn beach reputed to be a favourite haunt of glats – conger eels up to 10 feet long that lie in wait among the rocks near the shore. Once known as St Keyna's serpents, local people used to search for them using trained fish dogs.

Further to the southeast lies the

village of Holford, in the Quantocks, and a track from here leads up to the large Iron Age hill fortification known as Dowsborough Fort. Close by are also the dramatic viewpoints **Beacon Hill** and Bicknoller Hill. On the latter is another Iron Age relic, a livestock enclosure known as **Trendle Ring**. This is one of many archaeological sites in this area, which lies within the Quantock Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Taunton

 Taunton Castle	 Somerset County Museum
 Somerset Military Museum	 Bath Place
 Somerset County Cricket Museum	
 Vivary Park	 Taunton Racecourse
 St Mary Magdalene Church	
 Bridgwater & Taunton Canal	

Despite a settlement being founded here by the Saxon King Ine in the 8th century, Taunton, the county town of Somerset, has only been its sole centre of administration since 1935. Before that date, both Ilchester and Somerton had served as the county town. By Norman times the Saxon settlement had grown to have its own Augustinian monastery,



Taunton Castle

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a minster and a **Castle** – an extensive structure whose purpose had always been more as an administrative centre than as a military post. However, this did not prevent the castle from being the focus of two important sieges during the English Civil War. A few years later, the infamous Judge Jeffreys sentenced more than 150 followers of the Duke of Monmouth to death here during the Bloody Autumn Assizes. Even today, the judge's ghost is said to haunt the castle grounds on September nights.

The castle houses the **Somerset County Museum**, which is currently closed for refurbishment and is scheduled to re-open in 2011 as the Museum of Somerset. It contains the **Somerset Military Museum**, which is also closed, but some charming medieval almshouses can still be found at the castle site. Another of the town's old buildings is

still making itself useful today. Somerset's County Cricket Ground occupies part of the priory grounds that once extended down to the river. A section of the old monastic gatehouse, known as the Old Priory Barn, can still be seen beside the cricket ground. Now restored, this medieval stone building is home to the fascinating **Somerset County Cricket Museum**.

Soaring above the town is the exquisite 163 foot high tower of **St Mary Magdalene Church**. A church has occupied this site since at least the 12th century but the present tower was rebuilt to its original design in 1862. In order to raise the stone during this construction, a pulley system was used, operated by a donkey walking down Hammet Street. When the work was completed, the builders hauled the donkey to the top of the tower so that it could admire the view it had

OLIVE TREE DELICATESSEN AND COFFEE SHOP

10-10A The Bridge, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1UG
Tel: 01823 353707

email: enquiries@theolivetreetaunton.co.uk

website: www.theolivetreetaunton.co.uk

If you can make it past the temptations of the delicatessen, the Olive Tree also has a licensed Coffee Shop upstairs. It's an intimate place where diners know they will need to arrive early or reserve a table. The breakfast dishes are available all-day and include hot bacon baguettes, a breakfast panini, or simply a few slices of hot thick toast. Just as appealing are the luxury cream teas, including the Olive Tree's home-made scones with strawberry jam and lots of clotted cream. Hot dishes include soup-of-the-day, jacket potatoes, a choice of home-made quiche, pasta dishes and that traditional British dish, hominy pie.

The Olive Tree also prides itself on its impressive collection of cheeses from around the world which include the local Somerset Brie and the infamous Stinking Bishop. In the Deli you can buy many of these items and much more, such as speciality tea and coffee, olives, local jam and honey. There is also a selection of Somerset cider, wine and liqueurs.



ALPHA EXCLUSIVE FASHIONS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

2 The Courtyard, St James Street,
Taunton, Somerset TA1 1JR
Tel: 01823 324488

Alpha is located in a small complex of shops called The Courtyard near to the County cricket ground. For more than 10 years this family run boutique has catered for the fashion conscious citizens of Taunton and the surrounding area with an impressive collection of clothes and accessories to suit all. Many of the brands are exclusive to Alpha in Taunton.

Brands for men include Gant, Hackett, Polo Ralph Lauren and Barbour. Brands for women include Barbour, Stills, 120% Lino, James Jeans, Avoca, and Karen Cole. Among the many accessories are belts and buckles by Hamilton Davies and Butterfly Blue, handbags by Drift, Blondie Mania, scarves by Glen Prince and jewellery by About Face and Tutti & Co.



FINE FABRICS

Magdalene Lane, Taunton, Somerset TA1 1SE
Tel: 01823 270986
website: www.finefabricstaunton.co.uk

Located in central Taunton, **Fine Fabrics** have been suppliers of high quality fabrics for 27 years. With an extensive range of dress patterns, including those from 'Vogue' and many beautiful fabrics to choose from, you can find all you need to accomplish that special and individual bridal gown or evening dress. As a haberdashery, you can find everything you need to make your outfit and a wide selection of accessories are also available to complete your look.

Fine fabrics are stockists of many hobby craft materials including cross-stitch, embroidery and tapestry materials together with wool and knitting accessories. They are also suppliers of daylight and needlework lamps to aid you in your chosen pastime. There are many furnishing fabrics in stock and a variety of curtain accessories to meet your home furnishing requirements.

Fine fabrics offer private appointments to give customers professional advice with each stage of the dress making process, from choosing the patterns and selecting the fabrics, to the finished product.



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website: www.geraldavid.co.uk

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helped to create. The main body of the church is medieval and its interior distinguished by a host of carved saints, apostles and gilded angels floating above the congregation. The road leading to the church, Hammet Street, retains an impressive number of original Georgian houses.

Ardent shoppers will want to seek out **Bath Place**, a delightful narrow street of cottages mixed with an assortment of individual shops offering a huge range of goods and services. In medieval times, when this street was owned by the Bishop of Winchester, it was called Swains Street and was well known for its brothels, one of the few services not on offer here today. But you can have your hair done, your body pierced, lunch or dine in a choice of restaurants, and shop for arts and crafts, jewellery, glassware, books, computer games and much more.

Like many other West Country towns and villages, Taunton was a thriving wool, and later silk, cloth-making centre during the Middle Ages. The profits earned by the medieval clothiers went into buildings. Here their wealth was used in the construction of two huge churches: St James' and St Mary's. The rest of the town centre is scattered with fine buildings including the timber-framed Tudor House in Fore Street. Taunton is still a thriving place with an important commercial centre, a weekly market and a busy light industrial sector that benefits from some excellent transport links with the rest of the country.

Today, the **Bridgwater and Taunton Canal** towpath has been reopened following an extensive restoration programme and it provides pleasant waterside walks along its 14 miles. A relative latecomer, the canal first

opened in 1827 and was designed to be part of an ambitious scheme to create a freight route between Exeter and Bristol to avoid the treacherous sea journey around the Cornwall peninsula. For many years, the canal was the principal means of importing coal and iron from South Wales to the inland towns of Somerset, and of exporting their wool and agricultural produce to the rest of Britain.

Taunton's major open space is the extensive **Vivary Park**, located at the



Bridgwater and Taunton Canal

southern end of the High Street and approached through a magnificent pair of Victorian ornamental gates. Fully restored with lottery money in 2002, the 70-acre park is home to the Vivary Golf Course, the Taunton Bowling Club and Taunton Deane Cricket Club. Other features include tennis courts, a wildlife lake, a model boat pond, a bandstand, an ornate fountain commemorating Queen Victoria, a model train track and children's play areas.

Taunton's attractive **National Hunt Racecourse** lies on the opposite side of the motorway from the town and the combination of good facilities, excellent racing and glorious location make it one of the best country racecourses in Britain.

Around Taunton

CHEDDON FITZPAINE

3 miles N of Taunton off the A358

 Hestercombe Gardens

Spreading across the south-facing lower slopes

Hestercombe Gardens

Cheddon Fitzpaine, near Taunton,
Somerset TA2 8LG
Tel: 01823 413923 Fax: 01823 413747
e-mail: info@hestercombegardens.com
website: www.hestercombegardens.com

Lying on the southern slopes of the Quantocks, **Hestercombe Gardens** can be found on an estate that dates back to Saxon times but, from the 14th to the late 19th century it was continuously owned by one family, the Warres. It was Coplestone Warre Bampfylde who designed and laid out the magnificent landscaped garden in the mid 18th century. In 1873, the estate was acquired by the 1st Viscount Portman and it was his grandson, the Hon Edward Portman who, in 1904, commissioned sir Edwin Lutyens to create a new formal garden that was planted by Gertrude Jekyll.

of the Quantock Hills, the gorgeous **Hestercombe Gardens** (see panel below) form part of an estate that has been in existence since Saxon times. In 1872, the estate was acquired by the 1st Viscount Portman and it was his grandson, the Hon Edward Portman, who commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens to create a new formal garden that was planted by Gertrude Jekyll between 1904 and 1908. Within the 40-acre site are temples, streams and lakes, formal terraces, woodlands, cascades and some glorious views. Of all the gardens designed by the legendary partnership of Lutyens and Jekyll, Hestercombe is regarded as the best preserved.

STOKE ST GREGORY

7 miles NE of Taunton off the A378

 Willows & Wetlands Visitor Centre

A straggling village in the heart of the Somerset Levels, Stoke St Gregory provides an appropriate location for the **Willows and Wetlands Visitor Centre**, established by the Coates family, which has more than 170 years



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experience in the willow industry. Their 80 acres of willow provide the natural material for craftsmen to weave a wide variety of baskets, furniture and garden items for sale. Guided tours are available.

BURROW BRIDGE

9 miles NE of Taunton on the A361

 Somerset Levels Basket & Craft Centre

 Burrow Mump  Maunsel House

This village, on the River Parrett, is home to one of several pumping stations built in Victorian times to drain the Somerset Levels. The Pumping Station is open to the public occasionally throughout the year. Burrow Bridge is also the home of the **Somerset Levels Basket and Craft Centre**, a workshop and showroom stocked with handmade basket ware.

Rising dramatically from the surrounding wetlands is the conspicuous conical hill, **Burrow Mump** (National Trust). Situated at a fording point on the River Parrett, this knoll has at its summit the picturesque remains of an unfinished chapel to St Michael begun in 1793, but for which funds ran out before its completion. Burrow Mump is located in the heart of the low-lying area known as **King's Sedge Moor**, an attractive part of the



Somerset Levels drained by the Rivers Cary and Parrett. A rich area of wetland, the moor is known for its characteristic pollarded willows, whose straight shoots, or withies, have been cultivated on a substantial scale ever since the taste for wicker developed during the 19th century. The traditional craft of basket-weaving is one of Somerset's oldest commercial activities and it once employed thousands of people. Although the industry has been scaled down over the past 150 years, it is still alive and currently enjoying something of a revival.

The isolated Burrow Mump is reputed to be the site of an ancient fortification belonging to King Alfred, King of Wessex. He is said to have retreated here to escape from invading Vikings. It was during this time that he is rumoured to have sought shelter in a hut in the nearby village of Athelney. While sitting at the peasant's hearth, absorbed in his own thoughts, legend has it he allowed the cakes that the housewife had been baking to burn. Not recognising the king, the peasant boxed his ears for ruining all her hard work. In the 19th century, a stone was placed on the site recalling that in gratitude for his hospitality, King Alfred founded a monastery on the Isle of Athelney.

Just to the west of Burrow Bridge, the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal winds its way through some of the most attractive countryside in the Somerset Levels. The restored locks, swing bridges, engine houses and rare paddle gearing equipment add further interest to this picturesque walk. The canal also offers a variety of recreational facilities including boating, fishing and canoeing, while the canal banks are alive with both bird and animal life. At the canal's southern end, boats have access to the River Tone via Firepool

Lock in the heart of Taunton.

North Newton, one of the pretty villages along the canal, is home to the magnificent country manor of **Maunsel House**, which dates back to the 13th century. The house is set in 100 acres of stunning parkland at the heart of a sprawling 2000-acre estate, comprising farms, lakes, woodlands, walnut groves, orchards, Somerset wetlands, cottages and ancient barns. The house can boast such visitors as Geoffrey Chaucer, who wrote part of *The Canterbury Tales* whilst staying here. Occasionally open to the public, the house is always available for functions such as weddings and conferences.

HATCH BEAUCHAMP

5½ miles SE of Taunton on the A358

Hatch Beauchamp is a pleasant village that has managed to retain much of its rural atmosphere despite being on the major route between Ilminster and Taunton. Its name originates from *Hache*, a Saxon word meaning gateway, which refers to the ancient forest of Neroche whose boundary was just to the north and west. The Beauchamp element comes from the Norman family who owned the local manor and whose house stood on the land now occupied by one of the finest country houses in the area, Hatch Court, which, sadly, is now closed to the public.

PITMINSTER

3 miles S of Taunton off the B3170

 Poundisford Park

Recorded as Pipeminster in the Domesday Book, although there is no evidence of a minster ever having been built here, the village does have an old church containing 16th-century monuments to the Colles family. Just to the north of Pitminster is

Poundisford Park, a small H-shaped Tudor mansion standing within a delightful, wooded deer park that once belonged to the bishops of Winchester. The house is renowned for its fine plasterwork ceilings and the grounds incorporate a formal garden laid out in the Tudor style.

BRADFORD-ON-TONE

4 miles SW of Taunton off the A38

 Sheppy's Cider

Sheppy's Cider has been making its renowned ciders since the early 1800s and now boasts more than 200 awards, including two gold medals. Visitors can stroll through the orchards with their wide variety of apples, visit the museum for an insight into the farming of the past, watch a video following the cider-maker's year, and sample the finished product in the shop. Professional guided tours are available for parties of 20 or more. Other amenities on site include a licensed tearoom, picnic area and children's play area.

WELLINGTON

6 miles SW of Taunton on the A38

 Town Hall  Wellington Monument

This pleasant old market town was once an important producer of woven cloth and serge and it owes much of its prosperity to Quaker entrepreneurs and, later, the Fox banking family. Fox, Fowler and Co was the last private bank in England to issue its own notes - they only ceased in 1921 when they were taken over by Lloyds. The broad streets around the town centre are peppered with fine Georgian buildings, including the neoclassical **Town Hall**. At the eastern end of the town, the much altered church contains the ostentatious tomb of Sir John Popham, the judge who presided at the trial of Guy Fawkes.

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To the south of the town rises the **Wellington Monument**, a 175-foot obelisk erected not long after the Duke of Wellington's great victory at Waterloo. The foundation stone was laid in 1817 by Lord Somerville, but the monument was only completed in 1854. The duke himself visited the site and the town from which he took his title only once, in 1819.

WIVELISCOMBE

9 miles W of Taunton on the B3227

 Gaulden Manor

This is an ancient market town where the Romans once had a fort. A cache of 3rd and 4th-century coins has been uncovered in the area. Later, in medieval times, the local manor house was used as a summer residence of the bishops of Bath and Wells. The remains, including a striking 14th-century archway, have now been incorporated into a group of cottages. During World War Two, the church's crypt was used to store priceless historic documents and ecclesiastical treasures brought here from other parts of Somerset that were more at risk from aerial attack.

Known to locals as Wivey, this thriving local centre has numerous small shops, some with their original Victorian frontages, and several pubs that stock ales from the town's two breweries.

To the northeast of Wiveliscombe, close to the village of Tolland, is the delightful **Gaulden Manor** (see panel below), an estate that dates from the 12th century, although the present house is largely 17th century. It is currently not open to the public because of family illness and no date has been set for its re-opening. The house contains some outstanding early plasterwork, fine furniture, and many examples of embroidery by the owner's wife. The interesting gardens include a herb garden, old-fashioned roses, a bog garden and a secret garden beyond the monks' fish pond. Gaulden Manor once belonged to the Turberville family whose name was adapted by Thomas Hardy for use in his novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

To the north and west of Wiveliscombe, below the Brendon Hills, are two reservoirs, Wimbleball and Clatworthy, which offer

Gaulden Manor Gardens and House

*Tolland, nr Taunton, Somerset TA4 3PN
Tel: 01984 667213*

Set in a beautiful valley between the Brendon and the Quantock hills is the historic **Gaulden Manor**, a medieval house parts of which are believed to date back to the 12th century. The house is famous for its plasterwork, the date of which can be assessed by the coats of arms on the overmantles and depict two families joined by marriage in 1639. Parties can view the interior of the house by appointment.

The house is surrounded by a series of gardens that include the rose garden, a well-stocked herb garden, a bog garden and a butterfly garden. Tucked away lies the Secret Garden planted with white shrubs and roses whilst beyond is the Monk's Fish Pond and island and a grassy walk with old shrub roses and geraniums leading back to the house. Not an overly neat garden, this is a place to explore with something new and different around each corner. Plants propagated from the garden are for sale.



excellent facilities for picnickers, anglers and water sports enthusiasts.

NORTON FITZWARREN

2 miles NW of Taunton on the B3227

Large finds of Roman pottery have been excavated in and around this village, helping to confirm that Norton Fitzwarren was the Roman settlement of Theodunum. The village's name comes from the Saxon north tun (meaning north farm) and the Norman family who were given the manor here after the Conquest. Norton Fitzwarren's antiquity and former importance gave rise to the old rhyme, "When Taunton was a furzy down, Norton was a market town". Today, although the village has all but been consumed by its much larger neighbour, it has still managed to retain some of its individuality.

The land around Norton Fitzwarren is damp and fertile and, for hundreds of years, cider apples have been grown here. Cider made here is now transported all over the world, but until the early 19th century, cider was a beverage very much confined to Somerset and the West Country. It was the Rev Thomas Cornish, a local clergyman, who first brought cider to the attention of the rest of the nation, when he produced a drink so appetising that it found great favour with Queen Victoria.

BISHOP'S LYDEARD

5 miles NW of Taunton off the A358

 West Somerset Railway  St Mary's Church

 Bishop's Lydeard Mill

This large village is the southern terminus of the **West Somerset Railway**, a nostalgic enterprise that recaptures the era of the branch line country railway in the days of steam. This privately operated steam railway runs to



West Somerset Railway

Minehead on the Bristol Channel coast and, extending for nearly 20 miles, is the longest line of its kind in the country. It was formed when British Rail's 100-year-old branch line between Taunton and Minehead closed in 1971. There are 10 stations along the line and services operate between Easter and the end of October. The railway's special attractions include a first-class Pullman dining car and the *Flockton Flyer* locomotive, named after the 1970s children's drama series of that name, which centred on the adventures of a family running a preserved railway.

St Mary's Church has a magnificent tower built of local red stone around 1450. Fortunately, it was spared any insensitive Victorian restoration of the interior. Look out for the 'hunky punks' on the outside of the tower. Hunky punk is the local term for the carved creatures, which, unlike gargoyles that carry off rainwater, serve no useful function. St Mary's has five hunky punks – the one on the southwest corner of a dragon with a stone

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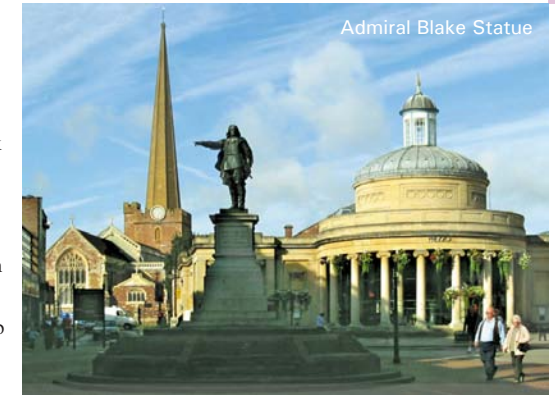
in its mouth looks particularly menacing.

The Grade II listed **Bishop's Lydeard Mill** has been painstakingly restored over many years by the Back family and is now fully working. Among the many traditional trades and crafts displayed here are a wheelwright's shop, transported from Devon and preserved exactly as it was left on the day the owner shut up shop, and an equally authentic blacksmith's shop. Other attractions include fun interactive displays, a gift shop and Dusty Miller's tearoom.

Bridgwater

 Blake Museum
 Somerset Brick & Tile Museum
 Carnival  Somerset Space Walk

Situated at the lowest bridging point of the River Parrett, Bridgwater is an ancient inland port and industrial town. Despite having been fortified since before the Norman Conquest, the settlement that grew up around the castle remained little more than a village until an international trade in wool, wheat and other agricultural products began to develop in the late Middle Ages. Bridgwater grew and, at one time, was the most important town on the coast between Bristol and Barnstaple. For a short period, it was the fifth busiest port in the country. The largely 14th-century parish church, with its disproportionately large spire, is the only building to remain from that prosperous medieval era. The castle was dismantled after the English Civil War and the 13th-century Franciscan friary and St John's Hospital disappeared long ago. Although the street layout here is still medieval, the buildings in the



Admiral Blake Statue

area between King Street and West Quay provide some of the best examples of domestic Georgian architecture in the county.

Bridgwater's most famous son is the celebrated military leader, Robert Blake, who was born here in 1598. When in his 40s, Blake became an important officer in Cromwell's army and twice defended Taunton against overwhelming Royalist odds. Just a decade later, he was appointed General at Sea and went on to win a number of important battles against the Dutch and the Spanish. In so doing, he restored the nation's naval supremacy in Europe. The house in which he was born is now home to the **Blake Museum**, which contains a three-dimensional model of the Battle of Santa Cruz, one of Blake's most famous victories, along with a collection of his personal effects. Blake was not the only military leader connected with Bridgwater. During the late 1600s, the Duke of Monmouth stayed here before his disastrous defeat at the nearby Battle of Sedgemoor. The museum suitably illustrates this decisive battle in the duke's quest for the English throne. Recently upgraded and re-opened in March 2010, this is also a museum of local history with a large collection of locally discovered artefacts on display that

date from Neolithic times right up to World War Two.

The highlight of Bridgwater's events calendar is its **Carnival** commemorating Guy Fawkes' Day. Believed to be the largest such event in the world, the celebration involves hundreds of themed 'carts', each ablaze with as many as 25,000 light bulbs, which join a procession more than two miles long, accompanied by various town bands. Following the procession, 'squibs', or giant fireworks, are carried through the town and set alight in the High Street.

An attractive amenity of the town is the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal which was completed in 1827 and can still be explored on water by canoe, trail boat or narrow boat, or along the towpath on foot or by cycle. Before the construction of a canal dock, the ships arriving at Bridgwater used to tie up on both sides of the river below the town's medieval bridge. Here, too, can be seen the last remnant of the medieval castle, The Water Gate, on West Quay.

The arrival of the canal gave a great boost to local industries. The manufacture of Bridgwater glass, which had begun the previous century, expanded greatly. The river mud that caused the decline of the town's port also proved to have hidden benefits, because when baked in oblong blocks it was found to be an excellent scourer. As Bath Brick, it was used for nearly a century to clean grates and stone steps. The canal terminus, where the brickworks also stood, was finally closed in 1970, but has now been restored as a fascinating area of industrial archaeology.

More of the county's industrial heritage can be explored at the **Somerset Brick & Tile Museum** on East Quay. The last surviving kiln at the former Barham Brother's yard is a

poignant reminder of the brick and tile industry that was once so important in the county. The kiln has been repaired by Somerset County Council and now provides the centrepiece of the museum.

An interesting feature on the canal is based at Lower Mounsel Locks, about five miles south of Bridgwater. **The Somerset Space Walk** uses the 13-mile length of the canal to represent the solar system with scale models of each of the planets. The sun is placed at the locks with the inner planets nearby; Pluto can be found on the outskirts of Taunton.

Around Bridgwater

HIGHBRIDGE

6 miles N of Bridgwater on the A38

Alstone Wildlife Park

The small coastal town of Highbridge was once a busy port on the Glastonbury Canal. Today its main visitor attraction is **Alstone Wildlife Park**, a small non-profit making, family-run park, which devotes all its proceeds to the welfare and upkeep of the animals. Open daily from Easter to November, the park is home to a variety of animals including Theodore the camel, a herd of red deer, wallabies, owls, pigs, emus and ponies.

BURNHAM-ON-SEA

7 miles N of Bridgwater on the B3140

St Andrew's Church Low Lighthouse

Brent Knoll

A traditional seaside resort as well as a thriving market town, Burnham-on-Sea has acres of sandy beach, a fine Edwardian Esplanade, a Pier Pavilion and a 15th-century church that was built close by the shore. This turned out to be a not very good idea. Because of the

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sandy foundations, the 80 foot tower of **St Andrew's Church** now leans three feet from the vertical. But the structure is apparently quite stable and has not shifted for many decades. Inside are parts of a massive altarpiece designed by Inigo Jones and carved by Grinling Gibbons. Originally installed in James II's Whitehall Palace, it survived the great fire that destroyed the palace and was re-installed in Westminster Abbey. But when the abbey was being prepared for the coronation of George IV the huge structure was deemed out of place and surplus to requirements. Somehow, the vicar of Burnham learned of its impending fate and managed to acquire it for his country church. The parts are now dispersed over various parts of the chancel.

In the early 1800s, the local curate, the Rev Davies, discovered mineral springs in the

gardens of Burnham Hall. An attempt was made to turn Burnham into a spa town to rival Cheltenham and Bath. A series of buildings was erected around the springs, the most notable of them being the Bath House, now Steart House, on the Esplanade. Unfortunately, the waters were too sulphurous and stinking for most convalescents to endure and the venture fizzled out. The town would have to depend on its wide sandy beach to attract visitors.

A distinctive feature on the beach is the unique nine-legged **Low Lighthouse**, a curious square structure raised above the beach on tall stilts. An earlier lighthouse, the High Lighthouse, erected in 1750, still stands inland behind the dunes, but because of the huge rise and fall of tides in the Severn estuary, its light was ineffective at low tides.

SEA BREEZE

37 Victoria Street,
Burnham-on-Sea,
Somerset TA8 1AN

Tel: 01278 783276

e-mail: seabreeze@btinternet.com



A breath of fresh air in the beautiful town of Burnham-on-Sea! **Sea Breeze**, which is one minute from the lovely beach, has changed the face of local arts and crafts since its opening several years ago. Eighty percent of the stock in the shop is sourced from local artists, craftsmen, jewellers, and designers, and the gallery upstairs hosts regular exhibitions of the very best in local art. The staff here are really friendly and knowledgeable, and are always happy to talk about the artists who created the gorgeous pieces on display.

The fascinating stock includes beautiful photos of the local area and dramatic coastline, digital art, and paintings in watercolour, oils, pastels and acrylics. As well as this the shop is full of lovely hand-crafted gifts, such as jewellery, handmade soaps, ceramics and glass; all attractive and well made. Some beautiful pieces for the home and garden, and fair-trade fashions, complete Sea Breeze's fun and unique look.

Hence the need for the Low Lighthouse.

To the northeast of Burnham rises **Brent Knoll**, a conspicuous landmark that can be seen from as far away as South Wales. Before the Somerset Levels were drained, this isolated hill would almost certainly have been an island. As with many other natural features that appear out of place in the landscape, there are several stories that suggest that the knoll owes its existence to the Devil. The 445-foot summit is crowned with the remains of an Iron Age hill fort. The summit, which can be reached by footpaths beginning near the churches at East Brent and Brent Knoll, offers walkers a spectacular view out over the Bristol Channel, the Mendips and the Somerset Levels.

BREAN

11 miles N of Bridgwater off the A370

 Animal Farm Adventure Park  Steep Holm

This elongated, mainly modern resort village is sheltered, to the north, by the 320 feet-high Brean Down (National Trust), an imposing remnant of the Mendip hills that projects out into the Bristol Channel. Another fragment can be seen in the form of the offshore island, **Steep Holm**. A site of settlement, ritual and defence for thousands of years, the remains of an Iron Age coastal fort and a Roman temple have both been found on Brean Down along with some medieval 'pillow' mounds. The tip of the promontory is dominated by the Palmerston fort of 1867, built as part of the defences to protect the Bristol Channel. There are also some 20th-century gun emplacements. As well as its archaeological and geological interest, this peninsula has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of its varied habitats. Oystercatcher and dunlin can be seen along the foreshore and estuary;

the scrubland is an important habitat for migrating birds such as redstart, redpoll and reed bunting; rare plants take root in the shallow and exposed soil; and the south-facing slopes are home to a variety of butterflies. Subject to one of the widest tidal ranges in Europe, the currents around the headland can be dramatic and very dangerous.

About a mile inland from Brean Sands beach, at Berrow, **Animal Farm Adventure Park** promises fun for all the family with a mix of domestic and rarer animals, including llamas, alpacas and emus; adventure play areas, ride-on tractors and a miniature railway.

WESTONZOYLAND

3½ miles SE of Bridgwater on the A372

 Battle of Sedgemoor  Pumping Station

Just to the northwest of the village, and on the southern bank of what is now the King's Sedgemoor Drain, is the site of the last battle to be fought on English soil. In July 1685, the well-equipped forces of James II heavily defeated the followers of the Duke of Monmouth in the bloody **Battle of Sedgemoor**. This brought an end to the ill-fated Pitchfork Rebellion that aimed to replace the Catholic King James with the Protestant Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of Charles II. Around 700 of Monmouth's followers were killed on the battlefield, while several hundred survivors were rounded up and taken to Westonzoyland churchyard, where many of them were hanged. The duke himself was taken to London where, 10 days after the battle, he was executed on Tower Hill. However, it was during the infamous Judge Jeffrey's Bloody Assizes that the greatest terror was inflicted on the surviving followers of the duke when well over 300 men were condemned to death.

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CLAVELSHAY BARN RESTAURANT

Lower Clavelshay Farm, North Petherton, nr Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 6PJ

Tel: 01278 662629

e-mail: query@clavelshaybarn.co.uk

website: www.clavelshaybarn.co.uk

Clavelshay Barn Restaurant nestles in an idyllic valley on the edge of the Quantock Hills within an area of outstanding natural beauty. It is set in the heart of a family-owned dairy farm and is in easy reach of Taunton, Bridgwater, and the M5.

Sympathetically converted from a beamed 17th Century Somerset Barn, the restaurant offers a monthly-changing menu, showcasing the very best in local seasonal produce. Where possible, free-range ingredients are sourced from the farm itself: fresh herbs and vegetables from our walled garden; eggs from our own Clavelshay hens; smoked meats and fish from our onsite smokery; pigeon and rabbit from the farm and fresh water from nearby springs.

Clavelshay Barn Restaurant is a flexible venue: generously proportioned, it stretches over two floors and offers al fresco dining on its picturesque patio. It is an ideal space for intimate dining; anniversaries; birthdays; Christmas parties; corporate events and weddings and has ample grounds for marquees both large and small.

Not only does Clavelshay Barn Restaurant offer the cream of local Somerset ingredients but also prides itself on the excellence of its friendly, professional service

So set your sat. nav. to TA6 6PJ and discover "a hidden gem of a place – off the beaten track but well worth finding". It's worth a trip to Somerset to dine at Clavelshay Barn on the edge of the Quantock Hills," Country Living - August 2010





Quantock Hills

A further 600 were transported to the colonies. Today, a stark memorial marks the site of the lonely battlefield.

The village lies in the Somerset Levels and a steam-powered **Pumping Station** was built here in the 19th century to drain the water from the levels into the River Parrett. The oldest pumping station of its kind in the area, the engine on show here was in operation from 1861 until 1952. Now fully restored, it can be seen in steam at various times throughout the year. The station itself is a Grade II listed building. Also on the site is a small forge, a tramway and a number of other exhibits from the steam age.

ENMORE

4 miles SW of Bridgwater off the A39

Quantock Hills Fyne Court Andrew Cross

To the west of Enmore the ground rises up into the **Quantock Hills**, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that runs from near Taunton to the Bristol Channel at Quantoxhead. Rising to a high point of 1260 feet at Wills Neck, this delightful area of open heath and scattered woodland supports one of the country's last remaining herds of wild red deer. The exposed hilltops are littered with

Neolithic and Bronze Age remains, including around 100 burial mounds, many of which now resemble nothing more than a pile of stones. The richer soil in the south sustains arable farms and pockets of dense woodland, and this varied landscape offers some magnificent walking with splendid views over the Bristol Channel, the Vale of Taunton Deane, the Brendon Hills and Exmoor.

It was this glorious classical English landscape that the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge so admired while they were living in the area.

Southwest of Enmore in one of the loveliest areas of the southern Quantocks is **Fyne Court** (National Trust), which houses both the headquarters of the Somerset Wildlife Trust and a visitor centre for the Quantocks. The main house here was built in the 17th century by the Crosse family. It was largely destroyed by fire in the 1890s and the only surviving parts are the library and music room that have been converted into the visitor centre. The grounds, which incorporate a walled garden, two ponds, an arboretum and a lake, have been designated a nature reserve.



Fyne Court

historic building museum and heritage historic site scenic attraction flora and fauna

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The most renowned occupant of the house was **Andrew Cross**, an early 19th-century scientist who was a pioneer in the field of electrical energy. Known locally as the 'thunder and lightning man', one of Crosse's lightning conductors can still be seen on an oak tree in the grounds. Local stories tell how, during one of his electrical experiments, Crosse created tiny live insects. It was this claim that helped to inspire Mary Shelley to write her Gothic horror story, *Frankenstein*, in 1818.

NETHER STOWEY

10 miles W of Bridgwater off the A39

Stowey Court Coleridge Cottage

Quantock Forest Trail

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

This attractive village of 17th and 18th-century stone cottages and houses is best known for its literary connections, but Nether Stowey has a much longer history. At one time, it was a small market town. A castle was built here in Norman times and the earthwork remains can be seen to the west of the village centre, while its substantial manor house, **Stowey Court**, stands on the eastern side of the village. The construction of the manor house was begun by Lord Audley in 1497 shortly before he joined a protest against Henry VII's taxation policy. Sadly, he was not able to see the project through to completion as he was executed soon afterwards.

In 1797, a local tanner, Tom Poole, lent a dilapidated cottage at the end of his garden to his friend, **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, who stayed here for three years with his wife and child. So began Nether Stowey's association with poets and writers. It was here that Coleridge wrote most of his famous works, including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and

the opium-inspired *Kubla Khan*. When not writing, he would go on long walks with his friend and near neighbour William Wordsworth, who had moved close to Nether Stowey from a house in Dorset at around the same time. Other visitors to the cottage included Charles Lamb. But it was not long before Coleridge's opium addiction and his rocky marriage began to take their toll. These were not the only problems for the poet as local suspicion was growing that he and Wordsworth were French spies. The home in which the Coleridges lived for three years is now **Coleridge Cottage**, a National Trust property where mementoes of the poet are on display.

A lane leads southwest from the village to the nearby village of Over Stowey and the starting point of the Forestry Commission's **Quantock Forest Trail**, a three-mile walk lined with specially planted native and imported trees.

Ilminster

Dillington House

One of Somerset's most beguiling towns, Ilminster is perched on the side of a hill with its main street running round, rather than up and down the slope. For centuries, it stood on the main London to Exeter route; today the A303 bypasses the town allowing its special charm to be enjoyed in comparative peace.

During the Middle Ages, it expanded further into a thriving wool and lace-making town. This period of prosperity is reflected in the town's unusually large parish church, whose massive multi-pinnacled tower is modelled on that of Wells Cathedral. Any walk around the old part of Ilminster will reveal a number of delightful old buildings,

stories and anecdotes famous people art and craft entertainment and sport walks

A TOUCH OF ELEGANCE

5 West Street, Ilminster, Somerset TA19 9AA

Tel: 01460 85992

e-mail: sue@atouchofelegancesomerset.co.uk

website: www.atouchofelegancesomerset.co.uk

Sue Woodbury developed her love of interiors after renovating a Somerset cottage and in 2000 she established **A Touch of Elegance**, a home interiors shop supplying furnishings of the highest quality. There is a vast range of contemporary and traditional wooden, glass and bespoke furniture from companies including 'Zoffany' and 'Duresta'.

The collections of high quality designer fabrics come from suppliers such as 'Colefax & Fowler', Sanderson, Designers Guild and Osborne Little among others lending themselves to the beautiful scatter cushions, bedspreads, curtains and the many curtain trimmings and accessories available. Old furniture can be revamped with quality upholstery and loose covers, and curtains and blinds can be made to measure with a choice of luxurious fabrics.

No part of the room is forgotten in A Touch of Elegance. With paints from 'The little green paint company' and 'Zoffany' and a wide range of wall coverings in a variety of designs and colours, there is something for every taste. To add interest, complete the room with one of the beautiful wall, ceiling or standing lights or choose from the collections of smaller ornamental pieces and giftware.



many constructed in golden Hamstone, including the chantry house, the old grammar school and a colonnaded market house. Another, the George Inn, proudly displays a sign proclaiming that it was the first hotel that Queen Victoria stayed at, as Princess Victoria, in 1819. The future queen was on her way with her parents to Sidmouth in Devon.

On the outskirts of Ilminster is another lovely old building, the handsome part Tudor mansion, **Dillington House**. It is now owned by Somerset County Council and used as a Residential Centre for Adult Education, but it was originally the home of the Speke family. In the time of James II, John Speke was an officer in the Duke of Monmouth's ill-fated rebel army that landed at Lyme Regis in 1685. Following the rebellion's disastrous defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor, Speke was

forced to flee abroad, leaving his brother, George, who had done no more than shake the duke's hand, to face the wrath of Judge Jeffreys. The infamous 'hanging judge' sentenced George to death, justifying his decision with the words, "His family owes a life and he shall die for his brother."

Around Ilminster

BARRINGTON

3 miles NE of Ilminster off the B3168

Barrington Court

To the east of the village is the beautiful National Trust-owned **Barrington Court**, famous for its enchanting garden influenced by the great 20th-century garden architect Gertrude Jekyll. This estate originally

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Barrington Court

belonged to the Daubeney family but it passed through several hands before becoming the property of William Clifton, a wealthy London merchant, who was responsible for building the house in the mid 16th century. In 1907, the by then dilapidated Barrington Court became the first country house to be purchased by the National Trust. It was restored in the 1920s by Col AA Lyle, to whom the Trust had let the property. The garden, too, was laid out during this time in a series of themed areas including an iris garden, a lily garden, a white garden and a fragrant rose garden. Gertrude Jekyll was brought in to advise on the initial planting and layout and the garden remains the finest example of her work in the Trust's care. There is also an exceptionally attractive kitchen garden with apple, pear and plum trees trained along the walls that, in season, produces fruit and vegetables for the licensed restaurant that can be found here.

DOWLISH WAKE

2 miles SE of Ilminster off the A303 or A358

John Hanning Speke Perry's Cider Mills

In the parish church of this attractive village is the tomb of **John Hanning Speke**, the

intrepid Victorian explorer who journeyed for more than 2000 miles through Africa to confirm that Lake Victoria was, indeed, the source of the River Nile. After his epic journey, Speke returned to England a hero but, tragically, on the very morning of the day that he was due to report his findings to the British Geographical Association, he accidentally shot himself while on a partridge shoot.

This picturesque village is also the home of **Perry's Cider Mills** where

the cider presses are installed in a wonderful 16th-century thatched barn. If you visit in the autumn you can see the cider-making in progress, but the presses and an interesting collection of vintage farm tools and equipment are on view all year round. The full range of ciders, including cider brandy, is available in the shop and can be sampled from the barrel before you buy. The shop also stocks a huge range of country-style pottery, stone cider jars, baskets, terracotta kitchenware, country jams and pickles and much more.

HINTON ST GEORGE

11 miles SE of Ilminster off the A356

Sir Amyas Poulett Lower Severalls

This wonderfully unspoilt former estate village has a broad main street, thatched houses, a medieval village cross and a striking 15th-century church. For centuries the village was owned by the Poulett family and it is thanks to them that Hinton St George has been left virtually untouched. The Poulletts arrived here in the 15th century and the house that they rebuilt then, Hinton House, now forms the main structure of the present day mansion, which has been converted into apartments.

Several ostentatious monuments to members of the Poulett family can be seen in the village's 15th-century Church of St George. Commemorated by a superb alabaster memorial is the most famous member of the family, **Sir Amyas Poulett**. A loyal and honourable courtier of Elizabeth I, Sir Amyas fell out of favour when he declined to act on the queen's suggestion that he murder Mary, Queen of Scots, who was in his custody. "A dainty and precise fellow," was the queen's scornful response to the knight's over-scrupulous behaviour.

On the last Thursday in October, called Punkie Night, it is traditional for Hinton children to beg for candles to put inside their intricately fashioned turnip and pumpkin lanterns. It is considered very unlucky to refuse to give a child a candle as each lantern is thought to represent the spirit of a dead person who, unless illuminated, will rise up at Halloween.

Hinton seems to have a special interest in light. It was the first village in England to install gas street lighting in 1863, and recently its modern street lighting scheme received an award from the International Dark Skies Association because its street lamps

minimise light pollution.

Lower Severalls has an enchanting and original garden set in front of an 18th-century Hamstone farmhouse. The garden has an informal style with profuse herbaceous borders around the house and innovative features that include a living dogwood basket, a wadi and a scented garden.

CREWKERNE

13 miles SE of Ilminster on the A30/A356

-  Church of St Bartholomew  Windwhistle Hill
-  Crewkerne Heritage Centre
-  Clapton Court Gardens  River Parrett Trail

Another delightful small market town, noted for its antiques and book shops, and the famous auction house of Lawrence's, which is housed in a restored linen yard. A thriving agricultural centre during Saxon times, Crewkerne even had its own mint in the decades leading up to the Norman invasion. Evidence of this ancient former market town's importance and wealth can still be seen in the magnificence of its parish **Church of St Bartholomew**, built using money generated by the late medieval boom in the local wool industry. A building of minster-like proportions, this is one of the grandest of the many fine Perpendicular churches to be found in south Somerset. Unlike many other towns in Wessex, whose textile industries suffered an almost total decline in later years, Crewkerne was rejuvenated in the 18th century when the availability of locally grown flax led to an expansion in the manufacture of sailcloth and canvas webbing. Among the many thousands of sails made here were those for *HMS Victory*, Admiral Nelson's flagship at the Battle of



Church of St Bartholomew

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Trafalgar. Nelson's captain in that engagement was Sir Thomas Hardy, educated at Crewkerne grammar school. Hardy's career is celebrated at the **Crewkerne Heritage Centre** recently relocated in a beautifully restored 18th century house.

The economic boost provided by the flax industry was further fuelled by the development of the London to Exeter stagecoach route. This led to the rebuilding of Crewkerne with elegant Georgian buildings, many of which can still be seen. The main areas, around Church and Abbey Streets, have now been designated an Area of Outstanding Architectural Interest.

To the west of Crewkerne rises the aptly named **Windwhistle Hill**, a high chalk-topped ridge from the top of which there are dramatic views, on a clear day, southwards to Lyme Bay and northwards across the Somerset Levels to the mountains of South Wales. The town also lies close to the source of the River Parrett. From here the 50-mile **River Parrett Trail** follows the river through some of the country's most ecologically sensitive and fragile areas, the Somerset Levels and Moors. Old mills, splendid churches, attractive villages and ancient monuments, as well as orchards, peaceful pastureland and traditional industries such as cider-making and basket-weaving can all be found along the route.

Just a couple of miles southwest of Crewkerne, close to the village of Clapton, are the varied and interesting **Clapton Court Gardens**. Among the many beautiful features of this 10-acre garden are the formal terraces, the rose garden, the rockery and a water garden. The grounds incorporate a large wooded area containing a massive ash tree that, at over 230 years old and 28 feet in girth, is believed to be the oldest and the largest in

mainland Britain. There is also a fine metasequoia that is already over 80 feet tall, although it was only planted in 1950 from a seed brought back from China.

HASELBURY PLUCKNETT

14 miles SE of Ilminster on the A3066

-  Haselbury Bridge

This delightfully named and particularly pretty village has a large part-Norman church whose churchyard contains a series of unusual 'squeeze stones', narrow entrances formed by two large slabs of stone. Just to the west of the village the lovely **Haselbury Bridge**, a medieval packhorse bridge, crosses the still young River Parrett.

CHARD

6 miles S of Ilminster on the A30

-  Chard Museum  Hornsbury Mill
-  Chard Reservoir Nature Reserve

The borough of Chard was first established in 1235 and, during the Middle Ages, became a prosperous wool centre with its own mayor, or portreeve, and burgesses. However, few buildings date from before 1577, when a devastating fire raged through the town and left most of it as ashes. One building that did survive the destruction was the fine Perpendicular parish church. The town was rebuilt and, today, many of these 16th and 17th-century buildings remain, including the courthouse and the old grammar school. Chard also has some striking Georgian and Victorian buildings. On the outskirts of the town the unusual round toll house, with its conical thatched roof, is a picturesque relic of the days of stagecoaches and turnpike roads.

Chard has expanded rapidly since World War Two; its population has more than

doubled. Nevertheless, the centre of this light industrial town still retains a pleasant village-like atmosphere that is most apparent in its broad main shopping street. At the western end of the town's High Street, housed in the attractive thatched Godworth House, is the award-winning **Chard Museum** amongst whose exhibits are displays celebrating two very inventive former residents. James Stringfellow produced the first steam-powered aeroplanes in the 1840s, and James Gillingham pioneered artificial limbs a few decades later. Also featured is Margaret Bonfield, who was the first female British cabinet member as Minister of Labour in 1929.

To the northwest of the town is a 200-year-old corn mill, **Hornsbury Mill**, whose impressive water wheel is still in working order. It stands in five acres of beautiful informally landscaped water gardens. The old buildings have been given a new lease of life and now incorporate a restaurant and bed and breakfast guest rooms, and also provides a popular venue for weddings, special events and conferences.

To the northeast, **Chard Reservoir Nature Reserve** is a conservation area where kingfishers, great crested grebes and other rare species of birds have made their home in and around the lake. The nature reserve also has a two-mile circular footpath that takes in rustling reed beds, broad-leaved woodland and open hay meadows.

TATWORTH

8 miles S of Ullminster off the A358

Forde Abbey

To the northeast of Tatworth lies a meadow that is the last remaining vestige of common land that was enclosed in 1819. Changes in the ownership of the land during the 1820s

allowed too many farmers grazing rights on the land, and the meadow suffered from being over-stocked. Therefore, in 1832, the holders of those rights met and, calling their meeting 'Stowell Court', they auctioned off the meadow for one year and shared the proceeds. So an annual tradition was born and the Stowell Court still meets on the first Tuesday after 6 April every year. Although many more customs have been added over the years, the auction proceedings are unique. They begin when a tallow candle of precisely one inch in length is lit and they end with the last bid before the candle goes out. Today, Stowell Mead is managed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and, as the land is not treated with fertilisers, pesticides or herbicides, it is home to many rare plants. There is no right of way across the land but it can be seen from the road.

A short distance to the southeast of Tatworth, just over the county border in Dorset, is **Forde Abbey** (see panel opposite), founded in the 12th century by Cistercian monks after they had made an unsuccessful attempt to found an abbey in Devon. For more details, see the entry in the Dorset chapter of this book.

WAMBROOK

8 miles SW of Ullminster off the A30

Ferne Animal Sanctuary

Visitors interested in animal welfare will be keen to visit the **Ferne Animal Sanctuary** at Wambrook. Originally founded in 1939 by the Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon, the sanctuary moved to its present position in the valley of the River Yarty in 1975. This pleasant 51-acre site incorporates a nature trail, conservation area, dragonfly pools and picnic areas.

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Forde Abbey

Tatworth, nr Chard, Somerset TA20 4LU

Tel: 01460 220231 Fax: 01460 220296

Originally founded by Cistercian monks in the 12th century, **Forde Abbey** lay empty for over 100 years after the Dissolution of the Monasteries before it was sold to Edmund Prideaux, Oliver Cromwell's Attorney General in 1649.

The remains of the abbey were incorporated into the grand private house of the Prideaux family – the old chapter house became the family chapel – and later additions include the magnificent 17th century plaster ceilings and the renowned Mortlake Tapestries that were brought over from Brussels by Charles I. Today, Forde Abbey is the home of the Roper family and it stands at the heart of this family run estate.

Along with the collection of tapestries, period furniture and paintings to see in the house, there is the refectory and dormitory that still survive from the time of the medieval monastery whilst the abbey is also home to the famous Eeles Pottery exhibition.

Meanwhile, the house is surrounded by wonderful gardens and they have been described by Alan Titchmarsh as "one of the greatest gardens in the West Country." There are sloping lawns, herbaceous borders, a bog garden, lakes and a working kitchen garden that supplies the abbey's restaurant with produce whilst rare and unusual plants are for sale at the Plant Centre. The estate is also known for its pedigree herd of cattle and the house, with its restaurant and tearoom, can be visited between April and October whilst the gardens and ground are open all year round.



Yeovil

 Church of St John the Baptist

 Museum of South Somerset

Yeovil takes its name from the River Yeo, sometimes called the River Ivel. There was a Roman settlement here, but the town really began to develop in the Middle Ages when a market was established that continues to be held every Friday. Yeovil's parish **Church of St John the Baptist** is the only significant medieval structure to survive as most of the town's other early buildings were destroyed by the series of fires that struck the town in the 17th century. A substantial structure with a solid-looking tower, the church dates from

the late 14th century and has a surprisingly austere exterior given its exceptional number of windows. It has so many windows that it is sometimes referred to as the 'Lantern of the West'.

During the 18th century, Yeovil developed into a flourishing coaching centre due to its strategic position at the junction of several main routes. Industries such as glove-making, leather-working, sailcloth-making and cheese-producing were established here. This rapid expansion was further fuelled by the arrival of the railway in the mid 1800s. Then, in the 1890s, James Petter, a local ironmonger and pioneer of the internal combustion engine, founded a business that went on to become one of the largest manufacturers of diesel

RED BARN FARM SHOP

Hinton Farm, Mudford, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 8BA

Tel: 01935 850994

website: www.redbarnfarmshop.moonfruit.com

Our traditional, family-run farm shop sells a wide range of fantastic produce - our prize-winning Guernseys deliver unpasteurised milk and cream, our seasonal vegetables, fruit and flowers come straight into the shop from a field five minutes away or from neighbouring growers, and our free-range hens are often to be found just outside the shop, checking for any stray crumbs. In May and June our asparagus is on sale within hours of being cut; we also sell meat from named local producers, local cheeses, jams and chutneys, and bread and cakes.



engines in Britain. Although production was eventually transferred to the Midlands, a subsidiary set up to produce aircraft during World War One has since evolved into a helicopter plant.

Today, Yeovil retains its geographical importance and is south Somerset's largest concentration of population. It is a thriving commercial, shopping, and market town best known perhaps as the home of Westland Helicopters. Situated in Wyndham House, the **Museum of South Somerset** documents the social and industrial history of the town and surrounding area, from prehistoric times to the present. A reconstructed Roman dining room and kitchen and Georgian House provide settings for countless items from the museum's extensive collection. Amongst many other intriguing exhibits is one that explains how a patent stove was the basis for the town's world-leading helicopter industry.

Around Yeovil

ILCHESTER

7 miles N of Yeovil off the A37

Ilchester Museum

In Roman times, the settlement here stood at the point where the north-south route

between Dorchester and the Bristol Channel crossed the Fosse Way. However, it was during the 13th century that Ilchester reached its peak as a centre of administration, agriculture and learning. Like its near neighbour Somerton, Ilchester was, for a time, the county town of Somerset. Three substantial gaols were built here, one of which remained in use until the 1840s. Another indication of this town's former status is the 13th-century Ilchester Mace, England's oldest staff of office. Up until recently, the mace resided in the town hall, but today a replica can be seen here, while the original mace is on display in the County Museum at Taunton.

The tiny **Ilchester Museum** is in the centre of the town, by the Market Cross. Here the story of the town from pre-Roman times to the 20th century is told through a series of exhibits that include a Roman coffin and skeleton. Ilchester was the birthplace, in around 1214, of the celebrated scholar, monk and scientist, Roger Bacon, who went on to predict the invention of the aeroplane, telescope and steam engine, although he was eventually imprisoned for his subversive ideas.

YEOVILTON

7 miles N of Yeovil

Fleet Air Arm Museum

Yeovilton boasts one of the world's largest

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aviation museums, the **Fleet Air Arm Museum**, which owns a unique collection of aircraft of which around half are on permanent display. Concorde is here along with a hangar full of fragile vintage aircraft. Visitors can 'fly' aboard the museum's own carrier; use interactive displays to explore the history and atmosphere of many of the aircraft stored here; and undertake the Merlin Experience that replicates a challenging flying mission. Other attractions include a children's adventure playground, a large book and souvenir shop, restaurant, airfield viewing galleries and a picnic area.

CHARLTON MACKRELL

9 miles N of Yeovil off the A37

Lytes Cary Manor

A couple of miles southeast of the town stands the charming manor house of **Lytes Cary Manor** (National Trust). This late medieval stone house was built by succeeding generations of the Lyte family, the best known member of which was Henry Lyte, the Elizabethan herbalist who dedicated his 1578 translation of Dodoen's *Crydeboeck* to Queen Elizabeth "from my poore house at

Lytescarye". After the family left the house in the 18th century it fell into disrepair, but in 1907 it was purchased and restored by Sir Walter Jenner, son of the famous Victorian physician. Notable features include a 14th-century chapel and Tudor Great Hall. The present garden is an enchanting combination of formality and eccentricity. There is an open lawn lined with magnificent yew topiary, an orchard filled with quince, pear and apple trees, and a network of enclosed paths that every now and

then reveal a view of the house, a lily pond or a classical statue.

SPARKFORD

8 miles NE of Yeovil on the A359

Haynes International Motor Museum

Cadbury Castle

The **Haynes International Motor Museum** is thought to hold the largest collection of veteran, vintage and classic cars and motorbikes in the United Kingdom. A living and working museum, it cares for more than 340 cars and bikes ranging from nostalgic classics to the super cars of today. The site contains 11 huge display halls; one of the UK's largest speedway collections; a kids' race track; adventure play area; gift shop and restaurant.

Just to the southeast of the village rises **Cadbury Castle**, a massive Iron Age hill fort first occupied more than 5000 years ago and believed by some to be the location of King Arthur's legendary Camelot. The Romans are reputed to have carried out a massacre here in around AD70 when they put down a revolt by the ancient Britons. A major excavation in the 1960s uncovered a wealth of Roman and pre-Roman remains on the site as well as



confirming that there was certainly a 6th-century fortification on the hilltop. This particular discovery ties the castle in with King Arthur who, at around that time, was spearheading the Celtic British resistance against the advancing Saxons. If Cadbury Castle had been Arthur's Camelot, it would have been a timber fortification rather than the turreted stone structure of the storybooks.

This easily defended hilltop was again fortified during the reign of Ethelred the Unready in the early 11th century. The poorly-advised king established a mint here in around 1000. Most of the coinage from Cadbury was used to buy off the invading Danes in an act of appeasement that led to the term Danegeld. As a consequence, most of the surviving coins from the Cadbury mint are now to be found in the museums of Scandinavia.

The mile-long walk around Cadbury Castle's massive earthwork ramparts demonstrates the site's effectiveness as a defensive position. This allowed those at the castle to see enemy's troop movements and it now provides spectacular panoramic views for today's visitors.

BARWICK

2 miles S of Yeovil off the A37

Barwick Park

Pronounced barrik, this village is home to **Barwick Park**, an estate dotted with bizarre follies, arranged at the four points of the compass. The eastern folly, known as Jack the Treacle Eater, is composed of a rickety stone arch topped by a curious turreted room. According to local stories, the folly is named after a foot messenger who ran back and

forth between the estate and London on a diet of nothing more than bread and treacle. The estate also possesses a curious grotto and a handsome church with a Norman font and an unusual 17th-century transeptal tower.

WEST COKER

3 miles SW of Yeovil off the A30

Brympton d'Evercy Manor

Close to the village of West Coker is the magnificent **Brympton d'Evercy Manor House** dating from Norman times, but with significant 16th and 17th-century additions. (The house is not normally open to the public but is available for civil weddings and other functions.) The superb golden Hamstone south wing was built in Jacobean times to a design by Inigo Jones. It boasts many fine internal features including the longest straight single span staircase in Britain and an unusual modern tapestry depicting an imaginary bird's-eye view of the property during the 18th century. When viewed from a distance, the mansion house, the little estate church and the nearby dower house make a delightful lakeside grouping.

In the church at nearby East Coker were

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buried the ashes of the poet and playwright TS Eliot. His ancestors lived in the village before emigrating to America in the mid 1600s and it provides the title for the second of his *Four Quartets*. Its opening and closing lines are engraved on a plaque in the church:

*In my beginning is my end.
In my end is my beginning.*

MONTACUTE

4 miles W of Yeovil off the A3088

Montacute House TV, Radio & Toy Museum

This charming village of golden hamstone houses and cottages has as its focal point the magnificent Elizabethan mansion, **Montacute House** (National Trust - see panel below), built in the 1590s for Edward Phelips, Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Rolls. There have been alterations made to the house over the centuries, most notably in the late 1700s when the west front was remodelled by the fifth Edward Phelips. In the 19th century the fortunes of the Phelips family began to decline and the house was leased out. In the

1920s, following a succession of tenants, the house was put up for sale. A gift from Ernest Cook (the grandson of the travel agent Thomas Cook) enabled the National Trust to purchase this outstanding Elizabethan residence. Constructed of Hamstone, the house is adorned with characteristic open parapets, fluted columns, twisted pinnacles, oriel windows and carved statues. The long gallery, one of the grandest of its kind in Britain, houses a fine collection of Tudor and Jacobean portraits on permanent loan from London's National Portrait Gallery. Other noteworthy features include magnificent tapestries and samplers on display from the Goodhart Collection; the stone and stained glass screen in the great hall, and Lord Curzon's bath, an Edwardian addition concealed in a bedroom cupboard. The house stands within a magnificent landscaped park that incorporates a walled formal garden, a fig walk, an orangery and a cedar lawn formally known as Pig's Wheaties's Orchard.

Some 500 years before Montacute House was built, a controversial castle was erected on

Montacute House

Montacute, Somerset TA15 6XP

Tel: 01935 823289

e-mail: montacute@nationaltrust.org.uk

website: nationaltrust.org.uk

Built in the late 16th century for Sir Edward Phelips, **Montacute** glitters with many windows and is adorned with elegant chimneys, carved parapets and other Renaissance features, including contemporary plasterwork, chimney pieces and heraldic glass. The splendid staterooms are full of fine 17th and 18th century furniture and textiles. Tudor and Elizabethan portraits, from the National Portrait Gallery are displayed in the Long Gallery, the longest of its kind in England. The House is surrounded by formal gardens with mixed borders, old roses and interesting topiary. The wider estate consists of landscaped parkland.



the nearby hill by Robert, Count of Mortain. The count's choice of site angered the Saxons as they believed the hill to be sacred because King Alfred had buried a fragment of Christ's cross here. In 1068, they rose up and attacked the castle in one of many unsuccessful revolts against the Norman occupation. Ironically, a subsequent Count of Mortain was found guilty of treason and forced into donating all his lands in the area to a Cluniac priory on the site now occupied by Montacute village. The castle has long since disappeared, as has the monastery, with the exception of its fine 16th-century gatehouse, now a private home, and a stone dovecote.

The village is also home to the **Montacute TV, Radio and Toy Museum** where a vast collection of vintage radios, wireless receivers and TV sets, from the 1920s through to the present day, is on display. It developed from the keepsakes hoarded by Dennis Greenham who had been in the electrical business since 1930. The huge collection of radio and TV memorabilia includes toys, books and games. There are also tearooms, gardens and a museum shop.

TINTINHULL

4 miles NW of Yeovil

Tintinhull Garden

A couple of miles to the east of Martock is another enchanting National Trust property, **Tintinhull Garden**, set in the grounds of an early 17th-century manor house. The house itself, which is not open to the public, overlooks an attractive triangular green that forms the nucleus of the sprawling village of Tintinhull. The garden was laid out between 1933 and 1961 in a series of distinctive areas, divided by walls and hedges, each with its own planting theme. There is a pool garden with a

delightful pond filled with lilies and irises, a kitchen garden and a sunken garden that is cleverly designed to give the impression it has many different levels.

Other interesting buildings in the village include a remodelled, part-medieval rectory, Tintinhull Court; the 17th-century Dower House; and St Margaret's parish church, a rare rectangular single-cell church.

STOKE SUB HAMDON

5 miles NW of Yeovil off the A303

Stoke sub Hamdon Priory Ham Hill

The eastern part of this attractive village is dominated by a fine Norman church; the western area of the village contains the remains of a late medieval priory. **Stoke sub Hamdon Priory** (National Trust) was built in the 14th and 15th centuries and later converted into a house with a very impressive Great Hall.

South of the village rises the 400 feet-high **Ham Hill** (or Hamdon Hill), the source of the beautiful honey-coloured stone used in so many of the surrounding villages. This solitary limestone outcrop rises abruptly from the Somerset plain and provides breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. A substantial hill fort, built here during the Iron Age, was subsequently overrun by the invading Romans. The new occupants built their own fortification to guard their major route, the Fosse Way, and its important intersection with the road between Dorchester and the Bristol Channel at nearby Ilchester.

It was the Romans who discovered that the hill's soft, even-grained limestone made a flexible and highly attractive building material and they used it in the construction of their villas and temples. Later, the Saxons and then the Normans came to share this high opinion

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ASH HOUSE HOTEL

41 Main Street, Ash, Martock,
Somerset TA12 6PB

Tel: 01935 822036

e-mail: reception@ashhousehotel.co.uk

website: www.ashhousehotel.co.uk

Ash House Hotel provides top quality accommodation set in 1.5 acres of beautiful gardens. The Ham stone building dates back to the early 18th century and inside the hotel has been restored to its former glory. The Georgian building, which has a flagstone floor dating back 300 years, contains nine en-suite rooms, which are all full of character and charm.

The rooms are comfortable and the beds have Italian cotton sheets and fluffy towels. All of the beds have mattress toppers and the bathrooms are equipped with power showers. Most of the rooms boast spectacular views over the hotel's gardens, which are floodlit at night and each have a hospitality tray of local treats. Produce is sourced locally and lunches and dinners are available in the hotel's Orangery, with daily changing menus, which are imaginative and finely executed.

The owner of Ash House Hotel, Gordon Doodson, has 25 years of experience in the hospitality trade, and he and his staff offer a warm and friendly welcome to all guests. For those on business trips the hotel has meeting rooms, business facilities and wireless internet connection. Well behaved dogs are also welcome. Ring for details.

There are plenty of things to do in the area with clay pigeon shooting, fishing, golf and bird watching among the most popular. For those seeking a cultural experience, there are plenty of museums and galleries in the vicinity as well as cider tasting. Walkers, cyclists and horse riders will be in their element with plenty of nature trails to explore. Passing through Martock, is the 50 mile long Parrett Trail. And for shopaholics there are plenty of shopping outlets nearby.

The hotel is located close to the village of Martock which is a mile from the A303 London to Exeter road. Yeovil is six miles away and the hotel is also within easy reach of the Blackdown Hills, the Mendips, the Quantocks, Exmoor and the Dorset coast. There are plenty of historical sites in the area including Montacute House, Barrington Court, Muchelney Abbey, East Lambrook Manor and Cadbury Castle.



of Hamstone. By the time quarrying reached its height in the 17th century, a sizeable settlement had grown up within the confines of the Iron Age fort though, today, only a solitary inn remains. A war memorial to 44 local men who died during World War One stands on the summit of Ham Hill. Now designated a country park, the combination of the view, the old earthwork ramparts and the maze of overgrown quarry workings make this an attractive place for recreation and picnics.

MARTOCK

6 miles NW of Yeovil on the B3165

 Treasurer's House  Pinnacle Monument

This attractive, small town is surrounded by rich arable land and the area has long been renowned for its prosperous land-owning farmers. Martock's long-established affluence is reflected in its impressive part 13th-century parish church. A former abbey church that once belonged to the monks of Mont St Michel in Normandy, the church boasts one of the finest tie-beam roofs in Somerset with almost every part of it covered in beautiful carvings.

The old part of Martock is blessed with an unusually large number of fine buildings. Amongst these can be found the **Treasurer's**



Market House, Martock

House (National Trust), a small medieval house of two storeys built in the late 13th century for the Treasurer of Wells Cathedral, who was also rector of Martock. Visitors can see the Great Hall, an interesting wall painting and the kitchen added to the building in the 15th century. Close by is the Old Court House, a parish building that served as the local grammar school for 200 years. To the west is a 17th-century Manor House, once the home of Edward Parker, who exposed the Gunpowder Plot after Guy Fawkes had warned him against attending Parliament on that fateful night.

Outside the Market House stands the **Pinnacle Monument**, an unusual structure with four sundials arranged in a square on top of its column, the whole finished with an attractive weather vane.

EAST LAMBROOK

8 miles NW of Yeovil off the A303

 East Lambrook Manor Garden

Just west of this charming hamlet is **East Lambrook Manor Garden**, which was planted with endangered species by the writer and horticulturist, Margery Fish, who lived at the medieval Hamstone manor house from 1937 until her death in 1969. Her exuberant planting and deliberate lack of formality created an atmosphere of romantic tranquillity that is maintained to this day. Now Grade I listed, the garden is also the home of the National Collection of the cranesbill species of geranium.

The low-lying land to the north of East Lambrook is criss-crossed by a network of drainage ditches or rhines (pronounced reens) that eventually flow into the rivers Parrett, Isle and Yeo.

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East Lambrook Manor Gardens

Originally cut in the early 19th century, the ditches are often lined with double rows of pollarded willows, a sight that has come to characterise this part of Somerset. Despite having to be cleared every few years, the rhines provide a valuable natural habitat for a wide variety of bird, animal and plant life.

MUCHELNEY

12 miles NW of Yeovil off the A372

 Muchelney Abbey  Midelney Manor
 Muchelney Pottery  John Leach Gallery

This village's name means the Great Island and it dates from the time when this settlement rose up above the surrounding marshland, long since drained to provide excellent arable farmland. Muchelney is also the location of an impressive part-ruined Benedictine monastery thought to have been founded by King Ine of Wessex in the 8th century. This claim was, in part, confirmed when, in the 1950s, an archaeological dig unearthed an 8th-century crypt. During medieval times **Muchelney Abbey** (English Heritage) grew to emulate its great rival at Glastonbury. After the Dissolution in 1539, the buildings, dating mainly from the 15th and 16th centuries, gradually fell into disrepair.

Much of its stone was removed to provide building material for the surrounding village. In spite of this, a substantial part of the original structure, including the south cloister and abbot's lodge, still stands.

Opposite the parish church, which its noted for is remarkable early 17th-century illuminations, stands the **Priest's House** (National Trust), a late-medieval hall house built by the abbey for the parish priest. Little has changed since the 17th century when

the building was divided. The interesting features to see include the Gothic doorway, the beautiful tracery windows and a massive 15th-century stone fireplace. Although it is still a dwelling, the house is opened on a limited basis.

At the **Muchelney Pottery**, John Leach continues the tradition of his famous grandfather, the potter Bernard Leach. Muchelney kitchen pots are used daily in kitchens all over the world, but the pottery is still very much a small family business. The pots are all lovingly hand-thrown, using local clays, and wood-fired in the three-chambered kiln to the high stoneware temperature of 1320°C, which creates their distinctive 'toasted' finish. Next door to the pottery is the kitchenware shop and the **John Leach Gallery**, which provides a showcase for the display and sale of signed work by John Leach and other potters, with a changing selection of paintings, ceramics, sculpture, textiles and woodwork by leading west country artists.

Just to the west of the village, near Drayton, stands the privately-owned **Midelney Manor**, originally an island manor belonging to Muchelney Abbey. A handsome manor house with architectural features from

the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, this has been in the hands of the Trevilian family since the early 1500s. The estate incorporates a heronry, a series of delightful gardens, a unique 17th-century falcon's mews and woodland walks. Although the house is not normally open to the public, there are self-catering cottages available on the estate.

LANGPORT

12 miles NW of Yeovil on the A378

 Langport Gap  Stembidge Tower Mill

 Langport & River Parrett Visitor Centre

The old part of this former market town stands on a rise above an ancient ford across the River Parrett. A short distance downstream from this point, the river is joined by the Rivers Isle and Yeo. Defended by an earthwork rampart during Saxon times, by AD930 Langport was an important commercial centre that minted its own coins. The only surviving part of the town's defences is the East Gate incorporating a curious 'hanging' chapel that sits above the arch on an upper level. It is now a Masonic Lodge and rarely open to the public. The impressive tower of the church at nearby Huish Episcopi can be seen through the barrel-vaulted gateway.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Langport flourished as a banking centre and the local independent bank, Stuckey's, became known for its impressive branches, many of which can still be seen in the surrounding towns and villages, although the bank has long since been taken over by NatWest. At the time of this amalgamation in 1909,

Stuckey's had more notes in circulation than any other bank in the country save for the Bank of England. Stuckey's original head office is now Langport's branch of NatWest.

Throughout recorded history, the **Langport Gap** has been the site of a number of important military encounters. Two of the most significant occurred more than 1000 years apart. In the 6th century, Geraint, King of the Dumnonii, was involved in a battle here, and in July 1645 the Parliamentary victory at the Battle of Langport gave Cromwell's forces almost total control of the West Country during the English Civil War.

More about life, past and present, on the Somerset Levels and Moors can be discovered at the **Langport and River Parrett Visitor Centre** through its series of hands-on exhibits and displays. Cycles are available for hire along with suggested cycle routes.

Just to the east, at Huish Episcopi, stands one of the finest examples in the country of a late medieval Somerset tower. At its most impressive in high summer when it can be viewed through the surrounding greenery, this ornate structure is adorned with striking tracery, pinnacles and carvings. The church



Floods on the Somerset Levels

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also has an elaborate Norman doorway, which still shows signs of the fire that destroyed much of the earlier building in the 13th century. A window in the south chapel was designed by Edward Burne-Jones, the 19th-century Pre-Raphaelite.

The church at Aller, just northwest of Langport, was the scene of another historic event. It was here, in AD878, that King Alfred converted Guthrum the Dane and his followers to Christianity following a battle on Salisbury Plain. The low wooded rise to the east of Aller is criss-crossed by a network of ancient country lanes that pass through some pleasant hamlets and villages including High Ham, the home of the last thatched windmill in England. Dating from 1822 and overlooking the Somerset levels, **Stembidge Tower Mill** (National Trust) continued to operate until 1910.

SOMERTON

13 miles NW of Yeovil on the B3151

 Church of St Michael  Courthouse Gallery

This small town gave the county its name, and for 100 years between 1250 and 1350 was also its administrative centre. The prosperity this brought to the town is reflected in the fine **Church of St Michael**, which was later enhanced even further by the installation of a magnificent roof. Carved around 1500 by monks from Muchelney Abbey, the gloriously coffered structure is supported by tie beams on which rest pairs of Wessex wyverns, or dragons. These gradually increase in size as they near the altar, culminating in two ferocious monsters snarling across the aisle at each other.

Somerton today is a place of handsome old stone houses, shops and inns. The general

THE COURTHOUSE GALLERY - HOME OF THE SOMERSET GUILD OF CRAFTSMEN

Market Place, West Street, Somerton,
Somerset TA11 7LX

Tel: 01458 274653

e-mail: courthouse@somersetguild.co.uk

website: www.somersetguild.co.uk



The **Courthouse Gallery** is the permanent home of the Guild which has been promoting excellence within craftsmanship in Somerset for over 75 years, since 1933. The Gallery exhibits and sells a diverse selection of eclectic and beautifully crafted items, representing the very best of craftsmanship from the length and breadth of Somerset and adjacent counties. Our ethos is to champion and nurture our local designers and host a number of themed exhibitions throughout the year to offer inspiring, contemporary, and affordable craft to suit all tastes. All craft has been created from a wealth of dedicated members who have gone through a stringent selection process to ensure excellence is guaranteed with every item. The Gallery is situated in the charming, ancient capital of Wessex, Somerton. An area steeped in fascinating history and where many a happy hour can be spent.

Gallery & Shop open throughout the year Mon – Sat 10am – 5pm

FREE ADMISSION

atmosphere of mature prosperity is heightened by the presence of a number of striking ancient buildings, most notably the 17th-century Hext Almshouses. Broad Street leads into the picturesque market place with its distinctive octagonal covered Market Cross and Town Hall. Between 1278 and 1371, Somerton was the location of the county gaol and the meeting place of the shire courts, as well as continuing to develop as a market town, reflected in the delightfully down-to-earth names of some of its streets such as Cow Square and Pig Street (now Broad Street).

The **Courthouse Gallery** in the Market Place provides a showcase for work by members of the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen. At any one time, as many as sixty members may be exhibiting here with artefacts ranging from

pottery and ceramics, glass, metalwork and wood, through to furniture and textiles.

Castle Cary

-  Round House  Castle Cary District Museum
-  War Memorial  John Boyd Textiles

This lovely little town, surrounded by meadows and woods, has an atmosphere of mature rural calm as well as some interesting old buildings, many of them built in the local hamstone that radiates a golden glow. There is a strikingly handsome 18th-century post office, a tiny 'pepper pot' lock-up gaol called the **Round House** dating from 1779, and a splendid Market House with a magnificent 17th-century colonnade. Largely constructed

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in 1855, the Market House is now the home of the volunteer-run **Castle Cary District Museum**. Perhaps the most interesting site here is the town's **War Memorial**, which stands in the middle of a pond said to be part of the old castle moat. It was used for many years as a drive-through bath for muddy horses and carts, for washing horsehair, and as a convenient place for ducking scolds and witches.

Just to the west of the town at Higher Flax Mills is an interesting survival from earlier days. **John Boyd Textiles** have been weavers of horsehair fabric since 1837 and are still using looms that were first installed in 1870. Horsehair was especially popular in Victorian times because of its durability and for being easy to clean. Furniture designers such as Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Lutyens and Charles Rennie Mackintosh all used horsehair

fabrics, which were also used for Empire and Biedermeier furniture. Guided tours of the mill are available by arrangement.

Around Castle Cary

BRUTON

4 miles NE of Castle Cary on the A359

-  Sexey's Hospital  Patwell Pump
-  The Dovecote

This remarkably well-preserved former clothing and ecclesiastical centre, clinging to a hillside above the River Brue, is more like a small town than a village. In the middle of the High Street is the 17th-century **Sexey's Hospital**, with a beautiful quadrangle providing a stunning view across the Brue valley. It has a small, candle-lit chapel with dark Jacobean oak pews and pulpit. The

THE COACH HOUSE

Alford, Castle Cary, Somerset BA7 7PN
Tel: 01963 240315
e-mail: liz@alfordcoachhouse.co.uk
website: www.alfordcoachhouse.co.uk



Liz Thring offers B&B and self catering accommodation at **The Coach House** in the village of Alford 2 miles west of **Castle Cary** on the B3153. The Coach House was converted recently into a comfortable and elegantly furnished family home with three guest bedrooms, two en suite and one with adjacent private bathroom. The self catering annex has one twin and one double bedroom, and can sleep up to six with z beds, and with access to a large garden. The Coach House is set in farmland and woodland with the river Brue running through the grounds. It is a lovely place to unwind and relax for a walking holiday and a perfect base for discovering the many scenic and historic attractions of the region.

HOLLY LANE

No.1 High Street, Castle Cary, Somerset BA7 7AN
Telephone: 01963 351259
Website: www.hollylane.co.uk



In Autumn 2008 **Holly Lane** opened their first shop here in Castle Cary – independent, stylish, full of delicious shoes, clothing and accessories. With a long list of well-known brands (including Out of Xile, Sandwich, Think & Manas), a great choice of shoes and clothes, and many happy customers, the shop is a real success. The guiding principle is simple – offer original and exciting product, and give superb service...

OATES AND MUSSON FINE FOODS

Fore Street, Castle Cary, Somerset BA7 7BG
Tel: 01963 359023
e-mail: katie@oatesandmusson.com
website: www.oatesandmusson.co.uk

Katie Lee-Pawsey opened her outstanding deli and grocery shop, **Oates and Musson Fine Foods**, in August 2009. The following April she won the award for 'Best Independent Food Shop in Somerset'. The shop had already won the "Best Independent Food Retailer" award from Taste of Somerset. "Our mission" says Katie, "is to provide locals and visitors alike with high quality, reasonably priced, sustainably sourced goods, and aim for 70% of all goods to be supplied within 50 miles of our doorstep". Her shop specialises in delicious local fayre, anything from scrumptious cakes to divine cheeses, ciders and ales, superb cold meats to yummy freshly prepared salads. Also on offer are organic, Fair Trade and sustainable produce, refillable cleaning products and Eco-friendly baby wares

Oates and Musson also offer a catering service, specialising in canapé parties, dinner parties and picnics for between 2 and 150 people. Everything you could possibly need for a romantic picnic for two, a family day out or to mark a special occasion. And if you are looking for an ideal present for someone who really appreciates fine foods and wine, why not check out the fine and bespoke hampers available?



hospital was founded by Hugh Sexey, a courtier of Elizabeth I and James I. It still accommodates the elderly and also has a school that is one of the few state boarding schools in England.

A priory was first established at Bruton in the 11th century, and although much of this has disappeared, the former priory church is now the parish church. The Church of St Mary has a rare second tower built over the north porch in the late 1300s. The light and spacious interior contains a number of memorials to the Berkeley family, the local lords of the manor who also owned the land on which London's Berkeley Square now stands.

Across the river from the church is the **Patwell Pump**, a curious square structure that was the parish's communal water pump and remained in use until well into the 20th century. Further downstream a 15th-century packhorse bridge still serves pedestrians. However, **The Dovecote** is arguably Bruton's most distinctive building. Now roofless, it can be seen on the crest of a hill to the south of the bridge. Built in the 15th century, the dovecote is thought to have doubled as a watchtower.

WINCANTON

5 miles SE of Castle Cary off the A303

Wincanton Racecourse Discworld Emporium

Wincanton's broad main street is flanked by substantial houses and former coaching inns, a faint echo of the era when as many as 17 coaches a day would stop here, pausing about halfway between London and the long-established naval base at Plymouth. At that time, the inns could provide lodging for scores of travellers and stabling for more than 250 horses. A former cloth-making centre, the oldest part of this attractive town stands on a

draughty hillside above the River Cale. An impressive number of fine Georgian buildings, some of which were constructed to replace earlier buildings destroyed in a fire in 1747, can be found here.

Modern day Wincanton is a peaceful light industrial town whose best known attraction, **Wincanton National Hunt Racecourse**, harks back to the days when horses were the only form of transport. Horse-racing began in the area in the 18th century and the racecourse moved to its present site to the north of the town centre in 1927. Wincanton is remembered as the course where the great *Desert Orchid* had his first race of each season during his dominance of steeple-chasing in the 1980s. For golf enthusiasts, the racecourse incorporates a challenging nine-hole pay and play course, which is open throughout the year.

Wincanton also has the distinction of being home to the only shop in the known universe devoted to artefacts inspired by the writings of Terry Pratchett, author of the *Discworld* novels, which have sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. At **The Cunning Artificer's Discworld Emporium** devotees will find all manner of wonderful objects ranging from the Mystic Prawn Medallion to the Dibbler Pie – "A culinary delight that will act as not just a superb paperweight, but also an appetite depressant".

TEMPLECOMBE

8 miles SE of Castle Cary on the A357

Gartell Light Railway
 Templecombe Railway Museum

To the east of the village is the unusual **Gartell Light Railway**, a rare two-foot gauge line that runs for around a mile through the beautiful countryside of Blackmore Vale on

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HOLLY LANE

17 Sadler Street, Wells, Somerset BA5 2RR
Telephone: 01749 679599
Website: www.hollylane.co.uk

In Autumn 2009 **Holly Lane** opened their second shop here in Wells – independent, stylish, full of delicious shoes, clothing and accessories. With a long list of well-known brands (including Isabel Depedro, Part 2, Chie Mihara & Unisa), a great choice of shoes and clothes, and many happy customers, the shop is a real success. The guiding principle is simple – offer original and exciting product, and give superb service...



the track bed of the Somerset and Dorset Railway, closed more than 30 years ago. The trains run every 15 minutes from Common Line Station, which also has a visitor centre, refreshment room and shop. The nearby **Templecombe Railway Museum** houses a fascinating collection of artefacts, photographs and models that tell the story of the nearby station, once a busy junction where some 130 railwaymen worked.

Wells

Cathedral of St Andrew Astronomical Clock
 Bishop's Palace Penniless Porch
 Wells & Mendip Museum

This ancient ecclesiastical centre derives its name from a line of springs that rise up from the base of the Mendips and deliver water at the rate of some 40 gallons per second. The first church here is believed to have been founded by King Ine in around AD700; the present **Cathedral of St Andrew** was begun in the 12th century. Taking more than three centuries to complete, this magnificent building demonstrates the three main styles of Gothic architecture. Its 13th-century west front, with more than 170 statues of saints, angels and prophets gazing down on the

cathedral close, is generally acknowledged to be its crowning glory. There used to be twice as many statues, all painted in glowing colours. Following the Civil War, Puritan fanatics mutilated or destroyed as many as they could and 700 years of exposure to the Somerset weather has scoured away the colours. A few, including the central figure of Christ in His Glory, have been replaced with faithful copies.

Inside the cathedral there are many superb features including the beautiful and unique scissor arches and the great 14th-century stained glass window over the high altar. However, the cathedral's most impressive artefact is its 14th-century **Astronomical Clock**, one of the oldest working timepieces in the world. It displays the minutes, hours and phases of the moon on separate inner and



Bishop's Palace

outer dials and marks the quarter hours with a lively battle between knights.

The west front of the cathedral has an internal passage with pierced apertures and there is a theory that choirboys might have sung through these openings to give the illusion to those gathered on the cathedral green that the then lifelike painted statues were singing.

To the south of the cathedral's cloisters is the **Bishop's Palace**, a remarkable fortified medieval building, which has been the home of the bishops of Bath and Wells since 1206. The palace is enclosed by a high wall and surrounded by a moat fed by the springs that give the city its name. A pair of mute swans on the moat can often be seen at the Gatehouse, ringing a bell for food. Swans were trained to do this in the 19th century and the present pair continue the tradition, passing it on to their young.

In order to gain access to the palace from the Market Place, visitors must pass under a 13th-century stone arch known as the Bishop's Eye and then cross a drawbridge that was last raised for defensive purposes in 1831. Although it is still an official residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, visitors can tour the palace's chapel, the 13th-century Great Hall and the beautiful gardens where many of the fine trees were planted in 1821. On the northern side of the cathedral green is the Vicar's Close, completed in 1363. This picturesque cobbled thoroughfare was built to house the cathedral choristers.

The cathedral green is surrounded by a high wall breached at only three castellated entrance points. One of these, the gateway into the Market Place, is known as **Penniless Porch**. It was here that the bishop allowed the city's poor to beg for money from those entering

the cathedral close. Set in the pavement here is a length of brass that extends over the prodigious distance leapt by local girl Mary Rand when she set a world record for the long jump at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

There is, of course, much more to Wells than its ecclesiastical buildings and heritage. The **Wells and Mendip Museum**, found near the west front of the cathedral, explains much of the history of the city and surrounding area through a collection of interesting locally found artefacts. Amongst these are some Roman coins and lead ingots, geological remains some 180 million years old when the Mendip Hills were a tropical paradise, and the remains of the 'Witch' of Wookey Hole.

The city also remains a lively market centre, with a street market held every Wednesday and Saturday. For a grand view of Wells from a distance, follow the attractive footpath that starts from the Moat Walk and leads up the summit of Tor Hill.

Around Wells

STRATTON-ON-THE-FOSSE

9 miles NE of Wells on the A367

Downside Abbey

This former coal mining village is home to the famous Roman Catholic boys' public school, **Downside Abbey**, which occupies the site of a monastery founded in 1814 by a group of English Benedictines. The steady expansion of the school during the 20th century encouraged the monks to move to a new site on higher ground near the existing abbey church, an impressive building that took over 70 years to complete and numbered among its architects Sir Giles Gilbert Scott.

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MIDSOMER NORTON

10 miles NE of Wells on the B3355

Radstock, Midsomer North & District Museum

The history of the area around this town is one of mining, with coal being hewn from nearby Norton Hill until as recently as the 1970s. In the churchyard of the town's parish church is a memorial to the 12 miners who were killed in an accident at Wellsway coal works in 1839. The surrounding countryside is beautiful and the sights and sounds of collieries have long since been replaced with that of open farmland. Midsomer Norton itself is a pleasant mix of old and new. There are excellent shopping facilities along with attractive Georgian buildings and a late medieval tithe barn.

At the interesting **Radstock, Midsomer North and District Museum**, housed in a converted 18th-century barn, more information can be sought about the Somerset coalfield as the museum is devoted to the people of the local coal mines, along with other exhibits relating to the railways, farms and schools of the area.

CAMELEY

10 miles NE of Wells off the A37

St James's Church

This attractive village is home to a church



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referred to by John Betjeman as "Rip Van Winkle's Church". When the village of Cameley was moved to nearby Temple Cloud in the 1700s, **St James's Church** was left alone on its low hill. Its old box pews are still in place and seem to have been custom-made for their owners. Those who couldn't afford their own box could worship from the gallery along the south wall, which bears the legend "for the free use of the inhabitants, 1819". A row of hat pegs was also conveniently provided. In the 1960s, a remarkable series of medieval wall paintings was discovered here, under layers of whitewash. The murals are believed to have been painted between the 11th and the 17th centuries and feature such diverse images as the foot of a giant St Christopher stepping through a fish and crab infested river, a charming 14th-century jester complete with harlequin costume, and a rare coat of arms of Charles I.

MELLS

13 miles NE of Wells off the A362

John Horner

Mells was at one time on the easternmost limit of the lands belonging to Glastonbury Abbey. In the 15th century, the Abbot of Glastonbury drew up plans to rebuild the village in the shape of a St Anthony's cross, with four arms of equal length. However, only one street, New Street, was ever completed. This architectural gem can still be seen to the south of St Andrew's parish church. While the exterior of the church is certainly imposing, the main interest lies inside where there is a remarkable collection of monuments designed by masters such as Lutyens, Gill, Munnings and Burne-Jones. One of the memorials is to Raymond, the eldest son of Herbert Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister. Raymond was

killed in the First World War. Raymond's sister was Violet Bonham Carter, whose grave is in the churchyard. Another memorial in the churchyard honours the pacifist and poet Siegfried Sassoon.

According to legend, the Abbot of Glastonbury, in an attempt to stave off Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, dispatched his steward, **John Horner**, to London with a gift for the king consisting of a pie into which was baked the title deeds of 12 ecclesiastical manor houses. However, rather than attempting to persuade the king, Horner returned to Somerset the rightful owner of three of the manors himself. He paid a total of £2000 for Mells, Nunnery and Leigh-upon-Mendip. This blatant act of disloyalty is, supposedly, commemorated in the nursery rhyme *Little Jack Horner* that describes how Jack "put in his thumb and pulled out a plum". The manor house at Mells remained in the hands of the Horner family until the early 20th century, when it passed to the Asquith family by marriage.

LULLINGTON

19 miles NE of Wells off the B3090

Orchardleigh Park

A footpath leads southwards from this peaceful riverside village to **Orchardleigh Park**, an imposing Victorian mansion built in

the mid 1800s and now a popular venue for civil weddings and conferences. In the 550 acres of parkland surrounding the house is a lake with an island on which is a small church whose graveyard contains the grave of Sir Henry Newbolt, the author of *Drake's Drum*.

SHEPTON MALLET

6 miles E of Wells on the A371

Church of St Peter & St Paul Market Cross

The Shambles Mid-Somerset Show

Royal Bath & Wells Show Pilton Manor

Tithe Barn

Situated on the banks of the River Sheppey, just to the west of Fosse Way, this old market town has been an important centre of communications since before the time of the Romans. The settlement's name is Saxon and it means, quite simply, sheep town. This reveals its main commercial activity from before the Norman Conquest to the Middle Ages, when Shepton Mallet was, firstly, a centre of woollen production and then weaving. The industry reached its peak in the 15th century. It was around this time that the town's most striking building, its magnificent parish **Church of St Peter & St Paul** was constructed. It is notable for its superb wagon roof with 350 small painted panels and for its pulpit carved from a single block of stone.

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Other reminders of Shepton Mallet's past can be seen around its market place where there is a 50-foot **Market Cross**, dating from around 1500 and restored in Victorian times. There is also **The Shambles**, a 15th-century wooden shed where meat was traded. After the Duke of Monmouth's ill-fated Pitchfork Rebellion, several of his followers were executed at the Market Cross in 1685 on the orders of the infamous Judge Jeffreys. Although it is a relatively nondescript building, Shepton Mallet's old prison, built in 1610, was thought to be so well away from the threat of enemy bombing that it was here that the Domesday Book was hidden during World War Two. It was also used during that period by the US forces as a military prison.

Today, Shepton Mallet is a prosperous light industrial town that has a good selection of shopping and leisure activities. Each year the town plays host to two agricultural shows. The **Royal Bath and West Show**, which has a permanent showground to the southeast of the town takes place in late May/early June, followed in August by the **Mid-Somerset Show**.

To the southwest of the town stands a former residence of the abbots of Glastonbury, **Pilton Manor**, whose grounds have been planted with vines, mostly of the German Riesling variety. Visitors are encouraged to stroll around the estate and also take the opportunity of sampling the vineyard's end product. Another legacy of Glastonbury Abbey can be found at Pilton village where there is a great cruciform Tithe Barn that stands on a hill surrounded by beech and chestnut trees. Unfortunately, the barn lost its arch-braced roof when it was struck by lightning in 1963, but has since been restored.

At Croscombe, to the west of Shepton Mallet, is another fine 15th-century **Tithe Barn**, a reminder of the days when the local tenant farmers paid a proportion of their crops each year to their ecclesiastical landlords.

NUNNEY

12 miles E of Wells off the A361

Castle

This picturesque old market town is dominated by its dramatic moated **Castle**, begun in 1373 by Sir John de la Mare on his return from the French wars. Thought to have been modelled on the Bastille, the fortress consists of four solidly built towers that stand on an island formed by a stream on one side and a broad water-filled moat on the other. The castle came under attack from Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War and, despite having a garrison of only one officer, eight men and a handful of civilian refugees, held out for two days. However, the bombardment damaged the building beyond repair and it had to be abandoned, leaving the romantic ruins that can still be seen today. One of the 30-pound cannonballs that were used by Cromwell's forces can be seen in the village's 13th-century church.

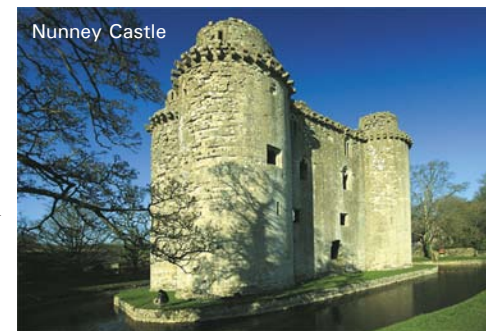
NOSTALGIA AT NO. 1

1 Market Place, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 5AZ

e-mail: contact@nostalgia-stonehouse.co.uk

website: www.nostalgia-stonehouse.co.uk

Niki Fretwell loves decorating her own home with vintage items and antiques she finds at flea markets, and recycles fabrics and other items to produce the hand crafted goods she sells at her new shop in the heart of Shepton Mallet. Whether you like old-fashioned Victoriana or frivolous fifties fun, you'll find something here, from cushions and quilts to handbags and hats, by way of pretty cottage prints, old photographs, rose decorated china, and boudoir accessories.



JENNY BARTON CERAMICS AT THE ENIGMA POTTERY STUDIO

Enigma Pottery Studio, Vicarage Street,
Frome, Somerset BA11 1PX
Tel: 01373 452079

e-mail: jbarton@enigmapottery.co.uk
website: www.enigmapottery.co.uk

Jenny Barton's Ceramics can be found in the gallery shop of Enigma Pottery Studio. In the showroom on Vicarage Street visitors can browse and choose from the wide range of exquisite pieces created by Jenny in her studio in the walled garden behind the showroom. Random Ware is a full range of tableware for the discerning diner, in a choice of five textured designs. The plates and bowls, the mugs and jugs, the cups and saucers, the pots and cake stands are colour washed to suit the ambience of the customer's home and are high-fired to stoneware to make them dishwasher safe.

Romantic Mood Ware is a range of soap dishes, mugs, bowls, candle accessories and jewellery made from earthenware clay and finished in a smooth glaze with touches of colour to suit the mood. Bespoke Garden Ceramics are sculptures, plant pots and bird baths made to order, each piece hand-made and finished in stoneware ceramic for frost resistance. The range includes garden fairies (boys and girls) which can be dressed in the customer's chosen outfit. Jenny also organises adult and after-school pottery classes and pottery-making parties – please phone for details.



CREAM LUXURY KNITWEAR

33 Catherine Hill, Frome,
Somerset BA11 1BY
Tel: 01373 453311

e-mail: avril@luxuryknitwear.co.uk
website: www.luxuryknitwear.co.uk

Avril Mann, founder of Cream Luxury Knitwear, has long been passionate about knitwear and her designs are comfortable, easy to wear, suitable for all shapes and sizes, smart or casual, and equally suitable for town or country wear. She loves colour, and her collections move away from the drab monotone to vivid mix and match brights, giving her clothes a fresh, contemporary look and feel. Her luxury knitwear has graced the windows of top boutiques around the world, from New York and Beverley hills to Paris and London.

Originally based in London, Avril now lives, designs and makes everything here in Somerset with her team of expert knitters. Cream Luxury Knitwear offers a bespoke service, ensuring that every design in the shop can be ordered in the exact size and colour to suit each individual customer. This lovely boutique is open from 10 to 5 Tuesday to Saturday, and shoppers who can't get to Frome can order by phone.



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FROME

17 miles E of Wells off the A361

Blue House Longleat House

The fourth largest settlement in Somerset, Frome is an attractive town built on steep hills with cobbled streets and boasting more listed buildings than anywhere else in Somerset.

The town developed beside the river from which it takes its name, its first recorded building being a mission station founded in AD685 by St Aldhelm, the Abbot of Malmesbury. Such was the expansion around St Aldhelm's stone Church of St John that, by the time of the Domesday Book, the settlement had a market, which suggests that it was already a place of some importance. General markets still take place every Wednesday and Saturday.

Frome continued to prosper during the Middle Ages on the back of its cloth industry until competition from the woollen towns of the north in the 19th century saw the industry begin to decline. The trade in Frome died out completely in the 1960s. Since then other industries, printing in particular, have flourished and the population has doubled to more than 20,000.

Fortunately, this new growth has not spoil the charm of the town's old centre. Best

explored on foot, the town's old quarter is an attractive conservation area where, amidst the interesting shops, cafés and restaurants, can be found the **Blue House**. Built in 1726 as an almshouse and a boy's school, it is one of the town's numerous listed buildings. Another is the fine bridge across the River Frome, a contemporary of Bath's Pulteney Bridge dating from 1667, and unusual in having buildings along its length.

A popular excursion from Frome is to **Longleat House**, about five miles to the south and just across the county border in Wiltshire. The magnificent home of the Marquess of Bath was built by his ancestor, Sir John Thynne, in a largely symmetrical style in the 1570s. The interior is a treasure house of Old Masters, Flemish tapestries, exquisite furniture, rare books and the present Lord Bath's racy murals. The superb grounds were landscaped by Capability Brown and now contain one of the country's best known venues for a marvellous day out. In the famous Safari Park the Lions of Longleat, first introduced in 1966, have been followed by a veritable Noah's Ark of exotic creatures, including rhinos, zebras and white tigers. The park also offers safari boat rides, a narrow-gauge railway, a children's amusement area, a garden centre, and the largest hedge maze in the world.

FROME WHOLEFOODS

Cheap Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1BN
Tel: 01373 473334

Located in picturesque Cheap Street, noted for its speciality shops, **Frome Wholefoods**, established by Sheila Gore in 1997, offers an extensive choice of organic and natural whole foods. It also stocks a huge range of dried herbs and spices, organic beers and wines, Fairtrade products, and a selection of herbal medicines and cosmetics. Freshly delivered each day, you'll also find tasty bread made from local flour.



BALTONSBOROUGH

9 miles S of Wells off the A37

St Dunstan

Baltonsborough was one of the 12 manors owned by Glastonbury Abbey, which lies just to the northwest. In those days, the lives of the people of the village were completely governed by the monks. The permission of the abbey had to be sought before a daughter could be married, while on a man's death his chattels and beasts became the property of the abbey. **St Dunstan** is said to have been born here between AD909 and AD925 - the ancient flour mill in the village is thought to have been owned by Dunstan's father. Before entering Glastonbury Abbey, Dunstan found favour at the court of King Athelstan but, once he had given up his worldly possessions, Dunstan followed an austere regime. By setting himself apart from the abbey's other novices, Dunstan soon rose through the ranks of the religious house to become abbot, whereupon he enforced the strict Benedictine code. The wealth of Glastonbury grew under Dunstan and he also encouraged pilgrims to make their way here to see the holy relics. As well as being a great cleric and an entrepreneur, Dunstan was also an engineer. He was one of the first people to instigate the draining of the land in this area. From Glastonbury, Dunstan moved to Canterbury, where he was Archbishop until his death.

GLASTONBURY

6 miles SW of Wells on the A39

Glastonbury Abbey Lake Village

George & Pilgrim Hotel Rural Life Museum

Glastonbury Tor Glastonbury Festival

King Arthur

Today, this ancient town of myths and

legends, of tales of King Arthur and the early Christians, is an attractive market town still dominated by the ruins of its abbey. The dramatic remains of **Glastonbury Abbey** (see panel opposite) lie in the heart of the old town and, if the story of Joseph of Arimathea is to be believed, this is the site of the earliest Christian foundation in the British Isles. By the Middle Ages, Glastonbury was second only to Rome as a place of Christian pilgrimage.

Joseph of Arimathea, the wealthy Jerusalem merchant who had provided a tomb for the crucified Jesus, is said to have arrived at Glastonbury in around AD60. According to legend, while he was walking on the tor, Joseph drove his staff into the ground whereupon it took root and burst into leaf. Taking this as a sign that he should build a church, Joseph erected a simple church on the site now taken by the abbey. His staff is reputed to have grown into the celebrated Christmas-flowering Glastonbury hawthorn.

Today, the picturesque abbey ruins, with their associations with the legend of **King Arthur**, remain a great tourist attraction. It was Henry III who "caused search to be made for King Arthur's tomb" at Glastonbury. His workmen found it with suspiciously little difficulty. After digging down some seven feet, they unearthed a huge stone slab bearing a cross of lead. No body, however. So they continued digging another nine feet and then "found the bones of the great prince". This fortuitous find brought a further influx of sightseers to the town.

During the Middle Ages, Glastonbury Abbey was also an internationally renowned centre of learning, and scholars and pilgrims from all over Christendom made their way here. One of the guest houses built to

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Glastonbury Abbey

Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 9EL
Tel: 01458 832267 Fax: 01458 832267
e-mail: glastonbury.abbey@btinternet.com
website: www.glastonburyabbey.com

Set in the middle of the old market town, **Glastonbury Abbey** has been an influence on the lives of those who have lived in this part of the world for the past 1,950 years and there are many people who believe that the 'Somerset Tradition' makes the association even longer than that. It is said that it was here that the followers of Jesus landed shortly after His death and set up the first Christian settlement with its own church in Britain, whilst some traditions go further and suggest that Christ Himself came to Glastonbury as a boy on one of the boats of his great uncle, Joseph of Arimathea. The legends around Glastonbury would certainly indicate that it was Joseph of Arimathea, and not St Augustine centuries later, who started the Christian conversion of Great Britain in the 1st century.

What, however, can be said with more certainty is that Glastonbury Abbey was a major Christian sanctuary during the 5th and 6th centuries and, by the time of the Norman Conquest, it was considered to be the wealthiest and grandest abbey in the country. Such was its status within England during the Dark Ages that it would have been logical that the great Celtic monarch, King Arthur, should be buried here after his long struggle against the Saxons.

Following the Dissolution in the 16th century, the abbey fell into ruins and, along with it, King Arthur's tomb was destroyed. Nevertheless, a number of impressive remains have survived and these include **St Mary's Chapel**, the shell of the great church, and the 14th century **Abbot's Kitchen**. However, people coming here today come for three main reasons: to see where the first church might have existed; to see where King Arthur and Queen Guinevere might have been buried; and to enjoy the beautiful and peaceful parkland that surrounds the ruins.

The abbey is a private organisation run by trustees and, although a small concern, the abbey remains open throughout the year. Along with the ruins and the parkland, there is an award winning museum and a small abbey shop and visitors may also come across Brother Thomas Cleeve, the Guestmaster of 1538.



accommodate them is now the **George and Pilgrim Hotel**. Originally constructed in 1475, this striking building has old timber beams adorned with carved angels and an interior guarded by a series of 'curious monks' death masks. Close by is another 15th-century building, the handsome Tribunal that is home

to the town's Tourist Information Centre.

Even the town's **Rural Life Museum**, which explores the life of farmers in this area during the 19th and early 20th centuries, cannot escape from the influence of the abbey. Although the museum itself is housed in a Victorian farmhouse, there is an

impressive 14th-century barn here that once belonged to Glastonbury Abbey.

To the east of the town, **Glastonbury Tor** is a dramatic hill that rises high above the surrounding Somerset Levels. The 520-foot tor has been inhabited since prehistoric times and excavations on the site have revealed evidence of Celtic, Roman and pre-Saxon occupation. Because of its unusually regular conical shape the hill has long been associated with myth and legends. In its time, it has been identified as the Land of the Dead, the Celtic Otherworld, a Druid's temple, a magic mountain, an Arthurian hill fort, a ley line intersection and a rendezvous point for passing UFOs. Along with its mystical energy, the tor also offers magnificent panoramic views across Somerset to Wells, the Mendips, the Quantocks and the Bristol Channel. The striking tower at the summit is all that remains of the 15th-century Church of St Michael, an offshoot of Glastonbury Abbey. Between the tor and the town lies the wooded rise of Chalice Hill, where, it is said, Joseph buried the Holy Grail, the chalice used at the Last Supper.

In recent years, a new band of pilgrims has been making their way to Glastonbury every June. The first **Glastonbury Festival** took place in 1970 and 1500 people came; that figure has now multiplied by 100. Pop idols who have played here include Johnny Cash, David Bowie, Van Morrison, Led Zeppelin and many more. The event is now the largest open air festival in Europe.

To the northwest of the town is the site of a prehistoric **Lake Village** discovered in 1892 when it was noticed that the otherwise level fields were studded with irregular mounds. Thought to date from around 150BC, the dwellings were built on a series of tall

platforms that raised them above the surrounding marshland.

STREET

7 miles SW of Wells on the A39

Friends' Meeting House Shoe Museum

The oldest part of this now sprawling town lies around the 14th-century parish Church of the Holy Trinity, although most of the town itself dates from the 19th century when Street began to expand from a small rural village into the light industrial town it is today. Much of this growth was due to one family, the Clarks. In the 1820s, the Quaker brothers, Cyrus and James Clark began to produce sheepskin slippers from the hides of local animals. Many of the town's older buildings owe their existence to the family. In particular, there is the **Friends' Meeting House** of 1850 and the building that housed the original Millfield School.

The oldest part of the Clark's factory has now been converted into a fascinating **Shoe Museum**. Although the company is one of the largest manufacturers of quality footwear in Europe, it continues to keep its headquarters in the town and also operates the Clarks Village Shopping Outlet where 90 leading brands offer discounts of up to 60% every day.

MEARE

6½ miles SW of Wells on the B3151

Abbot's Fish House

Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve

Just to the east of this attractive village is an unusual medieval building known as the **Abbot's Fish House**. Before 1700, this isolated building stood on the edge of Meare Pool, once a substantial lake that provided nearby Glastonbury Abbey with a regular

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supply of freshwater fish. Before the lake was drained, this early 14th-century building was used for storing fishing equipment and salting the catches.

To the southwest of Meare, in terrain scarred by years of peat extraction, is the **Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve**, which provides a safe haven for rare plants and wildlife. Parts of the neolithic 'Sweet Track', the oldest man-made routeway in Britain, still exist beneath the wet peat. This remarkable timber track was constructed around 3800BC to cross a mile or so of reed swamp. Many artefacts have been found beside the trackway including stone axes, pots containing hazelnuts, a child's toy tomahawk and a polished jadeite axe from the Alps.

WOOKEY

2 miles W of Wells off the A371

Burcott Mill

A rare and historic working watermill, **Burcott Mill** has its origins in pre-Domesday times. Visitors can see stone-ground flour being handmade and join a tour led by the miller himself. The site also has an adventure playground, country tearoom, pets and picnic area, a pottery. And B&B accommodation.

PRIDDY GOOD FARM SHOP

Townsend Farm, Priddy, nr Wells, Somerset BA5 3BP

Tel: 01749 870171

website: www.priddygoodmeat.co.uk

Priddy Good Farm Shop is a family-run enterprise located on Townsend Farm, where the Simmons family have farmed for over 300 years. Will and Jo, who know many of their customers personally, supply high-quality produce that includes beef and lamb raised on their 400-acre farm, and locally sourced pork and poultry, all with full traceability and minimum food miles. Beside the cuts and joints they sell top-notch burgers, and their own prize-winning sausage rolls, pies and pastries. The shop also sells a wide variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy produce, pickles and preserves and baked goods. Open from Monday - Saturday 8am to 5pm and Sunday 8am - 12.30pm. Plans for 2011 include opening a café-tea room.



WEDMORE

7½ miles W of Wells on the B3139

Ashton Windmill

This remote village was the ancient capital of the Somerset marshes. King Alfred is said to have brought the newly baptised Danish King Guthrum to sign the Peace of Wedmore here in AD878. This treaty left Wessex in Alfred's hands but gave East Anglia, East Mercia and the Kingdom of York to the Danes. The village's main street, the Borough, is lined with fine stone buildings, including a lovely old coaching inn. The parish church's spectacular Norman south doorway is thought to have been carved by the craftsmen who built Wells Cathedral.

To the northwest of the village, near Chapel Allerton, is **Ashton Windmill**. It was built in the 1700s and has an unusual upturned boat-style roof. The site provides wonderful views over Cheddar Gorge and the Somerset levels.

WOOKEY HOLE

1½ miles NW of Wells off the A371

Great Cave Ebbor Gorge

Throughout the centuries, the carboniferous limestone core of the Mendip Hills has been

Ebbor Gorge



gradually dissolved away by the small amount of carbonic acid in rainwater. This erosion has created more than 25 caverns around Wookey Hole, of which only the largest half dozen or so are open to the public. The **Great Cave** contains a rock formation known as the Witch of Wookey that casts a ghostly shadow and is associated with gruesome legends of child-eating. During prehistoric times, lions, bears and woolly mammoths lived in the area. In a recess known as the Hyena's Den, a large cache of bones has been found, many of them showing signs of other animal's tooth marks. The river emerging from Wookey Hole, the River Axe, has been harnessed to provide power since the 15th century, and the present building here was originally constructed in the early 17th century as a paper mill.

Just to the northwest runs the dramatic **Ebbor Gorge**, now a National Nature Reserve managed by English Nature. There are two walks here, the shorter one suitable for

wheelchairs accompanied by a strong pusher. The longer walk involves a certain amount of rock scrambling. However, the hard work is rewarded as there is a wealth of wildlife here, including badger and sparrow hawk in the woodland, lesser horseshoe bats in and around the caves and buzzards flying overhead.

CHEDDAR

8 miles NW of Wells on the A371

Cheddar Gorge Pavey's Lookout Tower

Cheddar Man & Cannibal Museum

This sprawling village is best known for its dramatic limestone gorge, **Cheddar Gorge** (see panel opposite), which extends for some two miles and is one of the most famous and most often visited of Britain's natural attractions. It is characterised by its high vertical cliffs, from which there are outstanding views out over the Somerset Levels, the Quantock Hills and, on a clear day, across the Bristol Channel to South Wales. The National Trust owns most of the land around this magnificent ravine, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Numerous rare plants grow here and it is also a haven for butterflies. A circular walk through the area takes in plantations, natural woodland and rough downland. This is a place that draws rock climbers, but the less ambitious may like to take the 274 steps of Jacob's Ladder that lead from the bottom of the gorge to the top of the cliffs. Here, **Pavey's Lookout Tower** offers yet more spectacular views of the surrounding area.

While the gorge is undoubtedly everyone's idea of Cheddar, the village is also renowned for its caves and, of course, its cheese. Although much embellished by modern tourist paraphernalia, its two main show caves, Gough's Cave – an underground 'cathedral' – and the brilliantly coloured Cox's

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Cheddar Caves & Gorge

Cheddar, Somerset, BS27 3QF

Tel: 01934 742343

e-mail: caves@visitcheddar.co.uk

website: www.cheddarcaves.co.uk

Cheddar Gorge, a place of wild and rugged beauty, is a karst limestone and calcareous grassland Nature Reserve and home to many rare plants and animals, including endangered Greater Horseshoe bats. Cheddar Caves, inhabited by our ancestors up to 40,000 years ago, were re-discovered by Messrs Gough & Cox, enterprising Victorian showmen, and are world famous for their spectacular stalactite and stalagmite decorations, whose beautiful colours are mirrored in pools of water. Easy-to-use audio-guides tell the story of the caves' formation and discovery. These caves also fired the imagination of JRR Tolkien, author of the trilogy "Lord of the Rings", on his honeymoon visit in 1916. "The Crystal Quest", the dark-walk fantasy adventure, creates a similar world of elven magic and bold adventure underground.

The Museum of Pre-history, "Cheddar Man & the Cannibals", explores 40,000 years of British Pre-history, with demonstrations of Stone Age survival skills and beautiful cave art. Here you can discover the truth about why our *Homo sapiens* ancestors, throughout the world for most of pre-history, were cannibals.

From April to September, an open-top double-decker bus takes you on a sight-seeing tour through Cheddar Gorge, beneath rocky pinnacles rising sheer above you, the home of Peregrine falcons. There are 274 steps to reach a Lookout Tower for stunning views of this limestone countryside, then a 3-mile cliff-top walk right around Britain's biggest Gorge, climbing 400ft above the road, through this internationally important Nature Reserve.



Cave, are both worth seeing for their sheer scale and spectacular calcite formations. In 1903 an almost complete skeleton, named Cheddar Man, was discovered in Gough's Cave and this can be seen in the **Cheddar Man & Cannibal Museum**, along with cannibalised human skulls and flint tools. There are demonstrations of Stone Age survival skills and some intriguing cave art.

The Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company is the only cheesemaker left in Cheddar itself. Visitors can watch the various stages as rich, local milk is turned into award-winning authentic Cheddar cheese. After seeing cheese

being made you can treat yourself to a free taste at the taster bar and then visit the shop where the company's Cheddars are on sale together with local pickles, biscuits, hand-crafted cheese dishes, cheese knives and more.

Back in 1726, Daniel Defoe was already singing the praises of Cheddar's most famous product. "Without all dispute," he wrote, "Cheddar is the best cheese that England affords, if not that the whole world affords." Today, in south Somerset alone, some 50 tonnes of Cheddar cheese is produced each day by nine cheese-makers. The original unpasteurised handmade farmhouse Cheddar

is still produced on just two farms: Montgomery's in North Cadbury, and Keen's near Wincanton. Their round half-hundredweight cheeses are wrapped in muslin, kept for more than a year and turned regularly as they mature. The result is Cheddar cheese at its most perfect.

Since the term Cheddar Cheese refers to a recipe and not a place, the cheese can be made anywhere in the world. Somerset itself is dotted with cheese manufacturers of various sizes and a number of these establishments supplement their income by offering guided tours, cheese demonstrations and catering facilities for the many visitors who come to gorge on the local speciality.

CHARTERHOUSE

9 miles NW of Wells off the B3134

 Mendips  Black Down

Rising, in some places, to more than 1000 feet above sea level, the **Mendips** form a landscape that is like no other in the region. Although hard to imagine today, lead and silver were once mined from these picturesque uplands. The Mendip lead-mining activity was centred around the remote village of Charterhouse – the last mine in the district, at Priddy, closed in 1908.

Charterhouse takes its name from a Carthusian monastery, Witham Priory, which owned one of the four Mendip mining sectors, or liberties. This area has been known for its mineral deposits since the Iron Age and such was its importance that the Romans declared the mines here state property within just six years of their arrival in Britain. Under their influence, silver and lead ingots, or 'pigs', were exported to France and to Rome. The settlement grew into a sizable town with its own fort and amphitheatre, the remains of

which can still be seen today. Centuries later, improved technology allowed the original seams to be reworked and the area is now littered with abandoned mine buildings and smelting houses.

A footpath from Charterhouse church leads up onto **Black Down**, which is, at 1067 feet, the highest point in the Mendips. From here, to the northwest, the land descends down into Burrington Combe, a deep cleft said to have inspired the Rev Augustus Toplady to write the hymn *Rock of Ages*.

AXBRIDGE

10 miles NW of Wells off the A371

 King John's Hunting Lodge  Frankie Howerd

A small town with a delightful centre, Axbridge is now a conservation area. In its ancient market square stands an exceptional example of a half-timbered merchant's house dating from around 1500. Three storeys high and known as **King John's Hunting Lodge** (National Trust), the building was extensively restored in the early 1970s and is now home to an excellent Local History Museum. Although the Lodge has nothing to do with King John or hunting, its name is a reminder that the Mendip hills were once a royal hunting ground. Elsewhere in the centre of Axbridge there are many handsome Georgian shops and town houses.

Back in 1960, the town was by-passed and to celebrate the liberation of the medieval square and narrow streets from traffic, the town organised a pageant re-enacting its fascinating history. This has since become a traditional event, celebrated every 10 years. The two-hour spectacular costume drama in which some 500 people take part will next take place over the August Bank Holiday, 2020.

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About a mile west of Axbridge, near the village of Cross, is an unusual attraction. The late comedian **Frankie Howerd** lived in a cottage here for many years and, since he was a great hoarder, the cottage was full of hundreds of scripts, photographs and props, along with a pair of swords used in the film *Cleopatra* (a gift from Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor), two stone cats from Laurence Olivier, and a fossilised egg presented to Frankie by the Italian government after he starred in the film *Up Pompeii*.

In May 2008, the four-bedroom, pink cottage was put up for sale with an asking price of £800,000. The thousands of items of memorabilia, including Frankie's toupee, were available as optional extras for an additional £600,000. The property was acquired by the Frankie Howerd OBE Trust, but it is not clear whether it will re-open to the public.

Bristol

 Castle Park	 Bristol Cathedral
 Floating Harbour	 Clifton Suspension Bridge
 Museum of Bristol	 At Bristol
 Blue Reef Aquarium	
 Isambard Kingdom Brunel	 Theatre Royal
 Maritime Heritage Centre	 Redcliffe Caves
 Church of St Mary Radcliffe	 Goldney Grotto
 John Wesley's Chapel	
 City Museum & Art Gallery	 Cabot Tower
 Avon Gorge Nature Reserve	
 Bristol Zoo Gardens	

Bristol was Sir John Betjeman's favourite English city. It had, he said "the finest architectural heritage of any city outside London". Today it is also one of Britain's

most vibrant and stimulating cities and offers a fascinating combination of grand buildings, reverberant history and contemporary creativity.

Situated at a strategically important bridging point at the head of the Avon gorge, Bristol was founded in Saxon times and soon became a major port and market centre. By the early 11th century, it had its own mint and was trading with other ports throughout western Europe, Wales and Ireland. The Normans quickly realised the importance of the port and, in 1067, began to build a massive stone keep. Although the castle was all but destroyed at the end of the English Civil War, the site of the fortification remains as **Castle Park**.

Situated just to the west of the castle site stands **Bristol Cathedral**, founded in around 1140 by Robert Fitzhardinge as the great church of an Augustinian abbey. While the abbey no longer exists, several original Norman features, such as the chapter house, gatehouse and the east side of the abbey cloisters, remain. Following the Dissolution in 1539, Henry VIII took the unusual step of elevating the abbey church to a cathedral and, soon after, the richly-carved choir stalls were added. However, the building was not fully completed until the 19th century, when a new nave was built. Among the cathedral's



Bristol Cathedral

treasures is a pair of candlesticks donated in 1712 by the rescuers of Alexander Selkirk, the castaway on whom Daniel Defoe based his hero Robinson Crusoe.

During the Middle Ages, Bristol expanded as a trading centre and, at one time, it was second only to London as a seaport. Its trade was built on the export of raw wool and woollen cloth from the Mendip and Cotswold Hills, and the import of wines from Spain and southwest France. It was around this time that the city's first major wharf development took place when the River Frome was diverted from its original course into a wide artificial channel now known as St Augustine's Reach. A remarkable achievement for its day, the excavation created over 500 yards of new berthing and was crucial in the city's development. Later, in the early 19th century, the harbour was further increased when a semi-artificial waterway, the **Floating Harbour**, was created by diverting the course of the River Avon to the south. Another huge feat of engineering, the work took over five years to complete and was largely carried out by Napoleonic prisoners of war using only picks and shovels. Today, the main docks have moved downstream to Avonmouth and the Floating Harbour has become home port to a wide assortment of pleasure and small working craft.

Much of Bristol's waterfront has now been redeveloped for recreation. Down on the harbourside is **At Bristol**, one of Britain's largest and most exciting hands-on centres of science and discovery. There are more than 300 hands-on exhibits to explore, as well as live shows and a Planetarium. Close by, on Harbourside, the **Blue Reef Aquarium** transports visitors to the spectacular 'underwater gardens' of the Mediterranean and the stunning beauty of tropical waters -

home to everything from seahorses and puffer fish, to living corals and tropical sharks. Other displays reveal the diversity of the aquatic world with naturally themed mangrove, tropical rainforest and fast-moving river habitats alongside open-top tanks, caves, wooden walkways and bridges.

The aquarium hosts a programme of free daily events including entertaining talks and feeding displays as well as the awesome IMAX Cinema that will take you on an "immersive 3D journey".

Also in the old port area is the Bristol Industrial Museum, which is currently undergoing an extensive refurbishment and will re-open as the **Museum of Bristol** in 2011. It will present a fascinating record of the achievements of the city's industrial and commercial pioneers, including those with household names such as Harvey (wines and sherries), McAdam (road building), Wills (tobacco) and Fry (chocolate). Visitors will also find out about the port's history, view the aircraft and aero engines that have been made here since 1910 and inspect some of the many famous vehicles that have borne the Bristol name since Victorian times.

Another famous name, that of the engineer and inventor **Isambard Kingdom Brunel**, is closely associated with the city. His graceful **Clifton Suspension Bridge** soars 200 feet



Clifton Suspension Bridge

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SS Great Britain



above the Avon gorge to the west of the city centre. Opened in 1864, five years after the death of its designer, the bridge continues to be a major route into the city and provides magnificent views over Bristol and the surrounding countryside. Brunel's mighty *SS Great Britain*, the world's first iron-hulled passenger liner was launched in 1843 and is now berthed in a dry dock in the harbour. It forms part of the **Maritime Heritage Centre**, dedicated to the history of shipbuilding in Bristol. One exhibit tells Brunel's compelling and entertaining life story, including his strengths and achievements, failures and faults. And if you arrive in the city by train from London you will have travelled along the route Brunel engineered for the Great Western Railway. He also designed every one of the bridges and stations along the way, including Bristol's Temple Meads station.

In medieval times, the city's prosperous merchants gave liberally for the building of one of the most impressive parish churches in the country. **The Church of St Mary Redcliffe** was described by Queen Elizabeth I as "the fairest, goodliest and most famous Parish Church in England". Along with its glorious exterior, the church contains monuments to Admiral Sir William Penn, whose son founded the state of Pennsylvania in the United States, and John Cabot, the maritime pioneer who in 1497 was the first non-Scandinavian European to set foot on Newfoundland. (A replica of the tiny boat, *The Mattben*, in which Cabot made his perilous journey can be seen alongside Brunel's *SS Great Britain*.) The sandstone beneath St Mary's church is riddled with underground passages known as the **Redcliffe Caves**. There are occasional guided tours of these unusual natural subterranean caverns.

Another ecclesiastical building of note is **John Wesley's Chapel**, the oldest Methodist building in the world. It was built in 1739 and remains completely unspoilt. Visitors can explore the preacher's rooms above the chapel, stand in Wesley's pulpit and see his preaching gown, riding whip and bed.

Elsewhere in the city are The Red Lodge, the only remaining Tudor domestic interior in Bristol, which also has a lovely walled garden with a re-created Elizabethan-style knot garden; and the elegant Georgian House in Great George Street, which was built in 1791. This is one of the most complete 18th-century townhouses to have survived in Britain, its four floors all fully furnished and providing a fascinating insight into life at that time both above and below stairs.

The city is also home to one of the oldest theatres in the country to still be in use. The **Theatre Royal** was built in the 1760s and is the

home of the famous Bristol Old Vic theatre company. Backstage tours are available.

Next to the University, the **City Museum and Art Gallery** occupies a magnificent building, which contains no fewer than seven art galleries as well as temporary exhibitions. It also houses important collections of minerals and fossils, eastern art, world wildlife, Egyptology, archaeology and some exceptional Chinese glass.

Standing high on Brandon Hill above the harbour, the 150 metre-high **Cabot Tower** was built in 1897 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of John Cabot's voyage to Newfoundland. For the energetic, there's a spiral staircase inside leading to the top from where there are astounding views across the city and harbour.

The land just to the west of the Clifton Suspension Bridge is now the **Avon Gorge Nature Reserve** and there are some delightful walks here through Leigh Woods up to the summit of an Iron Age hill fort. On the eastern side of the gorge an old snuff mill has been converted into an observatory whose attractions include a camera obscura. Once a genteel suburb, Clifton is now an attractive residential area of elegant Georgian terraces. Here, too, is Goldney House, now a university hall, but also the home of the unique subterranean folly, **Goldney Grotto**, which dates from the 1730s. The walls of this fantastic labyrinth, filled with spectacular rock formations, foaming cascades and a marble statue of Neptune, are covered with thousands of seashells and Bristol diamonds, fragments of a rare quartz found in the Avon gorge.

Clifton is also home to **Bristol Zoo Gardens**, which cares for more than 400 exotic and endangered species. Its Monkey Jungle provides an immersive forest experience where

monkeys mingle with gorillas, and visitors can enjoy close-up walk-through encounters with lemurs. A new addition for the summer of 2008 is the Butterfly Forest featuring spectacular butterfly and moth species from across the world.

Around Bristol

CHEW MAGNA

6 miles S of Bristol on the B3130

 Church House  Stanton Drew

 The Wedding  Wansdyke

 Blagdon Lake  Chew Valley Lake

Situated just to the north of Chew Valley Lake, this former wool village is a pleasant place with some handsome Georgian houses. The nucleus of the village is its three-sided green whose surrounding shops and pubs are linked by an unusual raised stone pavement. At the top of the green is the striking early 16th-century **Church House** that was originally intended to be the venue for the annual church sales and for brewing the ale and baking the bread to be sold on these occasions. The funds raised at this event were used to maintain the parish church for the coming year. These church houses, built in the 15th or early 16th century, were mainly confined to the counties of Somerset and Devon. Close by is the impressive parish Church of St Andrew, a testimony to the former prosperity of this village. Inside can be seen the interesting double effigy of Sir John Loe, a 15th-century local squire reputed to be seven feet tall. Behind a high wall adjacent to the churchyard stands Chew Court, a former summer palace of the bishops of Bath and Wells.

Just to the east of the village is **Stanton Drew**, an ancient settlement that stands

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Stanton Drew Stone Circles

beside a prehistoric site of some importance – a series of stone circles over half a mile across that were constructed by the Bronze Age Beaker people between 2000 and 1600BC. This complex of standing stones consists of three circles, a lone stone known as Hauteville's Quoit and a large chambered burial tomb called The Cove. The stones are composed of three different types of rock: limestone, sandstone and conglomerate. They are thought to have been erected for religious, or perhaps astronomical, purposes. In common with many stone circles in western Britain, the origins of this stone circle are steeped in legend. The most widespread tale tells of a foolhardy wedding party who wanted to continue dancing into the Sabbath. At midnight, the piper refused to carry on, prompting the infuriated bride to declare that if she had to, she would get a piper from hell. At that point, another piper stepped forward to volunteer his services and the party resumed its dancing. As the music got louder and louder and the tempo faster and faster, the dancers realised, too late, that the good-natured piper was the Devil himself. When his playing reached its

terrifying climax, he turned the whole party to stone. To this day, this curious group of standing stones is still known as **The Wedding**.

A couple of miles to the north of Stanton Drew, the line of the ancient **Wansdyke** runs in a roughly east-west direction around the southern fringes of Bristol. Built during the Dark Ages as a boundary line and defensive barrier against the Saxons, short

sections of this great earthwork bank can still be seen, notably at Maes Knoll and along the ridge adjoining the Iron Age hill fort on Stantonbury Hill.

To the south of Chew Magna are two reservoirs constructed to supply Bristol with fresh water, but which also provide a first-class recreational amenity. The smaller **Blagdon Lake** was completed in 1899 and **Chew Valley Lake** in 1956. Together they have around 15 miles of shoreline and attract visitors from a wide area who come to fish, take part in water sports and observe the wide variety of waterfowl and other bird life that is drawn to this appealing habitat.

BARROW GURNEY

5 miles SW of Bristol on the B3130

Before the construction of the reservoirs of Blagdon and Chew Valley, Bristol's fresh water came from the three small reservoirs at Barrow Gurney. The first was opened in 1852, but within two years it developed a leak and had to be drained, causing a serious disruption to the city's water supply. Like many of the villages to the southwest of Bristol, Barrow Gurney has undergone considerable change since World

War Two and is now becoming a dormitory settlement for the city's commuters.

CONGRESBURY

13 miles SW of Bristol on the A370

St Congar

This sizeable village, which today appears to be just another commuter town, has a long and eventful history that goes back to Roman times. Around 2000 years ago a settlement stood here at the end of a spur of the Somerset marshes. Fragments of Roman and pre-Saxon pottery have been found on the ancient hill that overlooks the present village.

The early Celtic missionary, **St Congar**, is believed to have founded an early wattle chapel at Congresbury in the 6th century. A tree bound by an iron hoop, on the eastern side of the church, is still referred to as St Congar's Walking Stick. This is reputed to

have grown from the saint's staff that miraculously sprouted leaves after he had thrust it into the ground outside the chapel.

CLEVEDON

15 miles SW of Bristol on the B3133

 Clevedon Pier  Poet's Walk

 Clevedon Court

Clevedon was developed in the late 18th and early 19th-century as a resort, but the lack of a railway prevented the town from expanding further. It was overtaken by Weston-super-Mare as the leading seaside town along this stretch of coast. As a result there are few of the attractions that are normally associated with a holiday resort. A notable exception is **Clevedon Pier**, a remarkably slim and elegant structure that was built in the 1860s from iron rails intended for Brunel's ill-considered South Wales Railway. When part of the pier

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collapsed in the 1970s, its long term future looked bleak but, following an extensive restoration programme, the pier is now the landing stage, during the summer, for large pleasure steamers such as the *Balmoral* and the *Waverley*, the only surviving sea-going paddle steamers in the world.

Beginning at Clevedon promenade and leading up to Church and Wain's Hills is the **Poet's Walk**, a flower-lined footpath that is said to have been popular with Victorian poets. On the top of Wain's Hill, are the remains of an Iron Age coastal fort, from which walkers can look out over the town, the Somerset Levels and the Severn Estuary.

The town's major attraction is **Clevedon Court** (National Trust), an outstanding 14th-century manor house. One of the earliest surviving country houses in Britain, Clevedon preserves many of its original 14th century features still intact, and incorporates a massive 12th-century tower and a 13th-century great hall. Once partly fortified, this imposing manor house has been the home of the Elton family since 1709. As long standing patrons of the arts, the family invited many of the country's finest poets and writers to Clevedon in the early 1800s. These included Coleridge, Tennyson and Thackeray. It was while staying here that Thackeray fell in love with one of his host's

daughters, Mrs Brookfield. He was to spend some time here seeing her and writing *Vanity Fair*. Another member of the Elton family was Arthur Hallam, a student friend of Lord Tennyson who showed great promise as a poet but who died very young. Tennyson was devastated by his friend's untimely death and sought to assuage his grief by writing the great elegiac poem *In Memoriam, A.H.H.*, which was published in 1850.

Although the Elton family is closely associated with literature, one member of the family in the Victorian era invented a special technique for making the type of brightly coloured pottery that was to become known as Eltonware. It was particularly popular in the United States. There are many fine examples on display in the house, along with a collection of rare glass from the works at Nailsea. Clevedon Court is surrounded by beautiful 18th-century terraced gardens. A footpath leads through nearby woodland on to a ridge overlooking the low and once marshy Gordano valley.

BANWELL

16 miles SW of Bristol on the A368

 Bone Caves  Puxton Church

This pleasant village was once the site of a Saxon monastery and the parish church here is

PANACHE HOME ACCESSORIES & GIFTS

53 Hill Road, Clevedon,
Somerset BS21 7PD
Tel: 01275 877955

e-mail: sue_panache@btinternet.com

Clevedon is a quiet, pleasant resort complete with a promenade and a Grade 1 listed pier. The railway in Victorian times brought wealth and employment to the town the legacy of which is some fine architecture and a distinctive seafront.

A short walk from the pier is a road full of interesting shops; Sue Kelly's **Panache** is the place in town for home accessories and gifts. Behind its cheerful green awning Sue has assembled a hand picked selection of accessories for the home, including fabrics, wallpapers, decorative textiles and gifts to suit all occasions and purses. There are elegant table settings, glass and ceramic pieces that are both functional and attractive, stylish cushions and throws, lamps, photo frames, clocks and a large selection of stunning silk flowers. The stock is changing constantly so every visit is certain to reveal new and interesting ideas for the home. Sue also offers a curtain making service in the Clevedon area.

Panache is open 9.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Saturday.

Panache



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certainly ancient. Banwell Castle, on the other hand, although it looks like an authentic medieval fortress, is in fact a Victorian mansion house now converted into a hotel. Just to the west of the village, on Banwell Hill, a remarkable discovery was made in 1821. A series of caverns were found containing the remains of prehistoric animals including bison, bear and reindeer. They are now known as the **Bone Caves**.

A couple of miles north of Banwell is the village of **Puxton**, noted for its eccentric church tower that leans at such an angle that it looks as if it might topple at any moment, causing its weathercock to nosedive into the churchyard.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE

22 miles SW of Bristol on the A370

🏰 Grand Pier 🐡 Seaquarium 🌊 Sand Point
🏛️ North Somerset Museum 🚶 Mendip Way
🚁 Helicopter Museum 🏠 Worlebury Camp

This traditional seaside resort, whose greatest asset is undoubtedly its vast expanse of sandy beach, has in recent years also developed as a centre of light industry. As late as 1811, Weston was a fishing hamlet with just 170 residents. Within 100 years, it had grown to become the second largest town in Somerset and today has a resident population of around 70,000.

The commercial development of Weston began in the 1830s around the Knightstone, an islet joined to the shore at the northern end of the bay, and here were eventually built a large theatre and swimming baths. The arrival of the railway in 1841 stimulated the town's rapid expansion and, in 1867, a pier was

built on the headland below Worlebury Camp connecting Birnbeck Island with the mainland. Intended as a berth for steamer traffic, the pier was found to be slightly off the tourist track. Later, a more impressive pier was built nearer the town centre. Refurbished and extended, the **Grand Pier** was re-opened in July 2010 and now stands at the centre of an area crammed with souvenir shops, ice cream parlours, cafés and assorted attractions that are part and parcel of a British seaside resort. There are also the indoor attractions of the Winter Gardens, along the seafront, and the fascinating, family-friendly **North Somerset Museum**.

For anyone wishing to explore Weston on foot, the Museum Trail begins on the seafront and follows a trail of carved stones created by the artist Michael Fairfax. The **Seaquarium** has more than 30 intriguing marine displays, along with feeding times and demonstrations to amuse the whole family.

An excellent viewpoint to the north of the resort is **Sand Point**, a ridge overlooking a lonely salt marsh that is home to a wide variety of wading birds. At the southern end of Weston Bay, another spectacular view



Weston-Super-Mare Beach

🏰 historic building 🏛️ museum and heritage 📍 historic site 🌊 scenic attraction 🐡 flora and fauna

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opens up from the clifftop site of the semi-ruined church at Uphill. This village lies at the start of the sometimes demanding **Mendip Way**, a 50-mile footpath that takes in the whole length of the Mendip Hills, including the broad vale of the Western Mendips, the high plateau of the central part and the wooded valleys in the eastern region.

Just to the southeast of the town is Weston Airport, home to the world's largest collection of helicopters and autogyros. The only museum in Britain dedicated to rotary wing aircraft, **The Helicopter Museum** has more than 70 helicopters with exhibits ranging from single-seater autogyros to multi-passenger helicopters. Visitors can see displays on the history and development of these flying machines and a conservation hangar where the aircraft are restored. Grown-ups can take a Helicopter Experience Flight; under-12s can stage a rescue in the Lynx helicopter play area.

The area around Weston has been inhabited since prehistoric times. The wooded promontory at the northern end of Weston Bay was the site of a sizeable Iron Age hill settlement known as **Worlebury Camp**. In the 1st century AD this is said to have been captured by the Romans after a bloody battle. Recent excavations, which revealed a number of skeletons showing the effects of sword damage, provided confirmation. A pleasant walk from the town centre now leads up through attractive woodland to this ancient hilltop site from where there are magnificent views out across the mouth of the River Severn to Wales.

WRAXALL

6 miles W of Bristol on the B3128

🏰 Tyntesfield 🐡 Noah's Ark Zoo Farm

One of the National Trust's most fascinating

properties, **Tyntesfield** is an extraordinary Victorian Gothic Revival house that was home to four generations of the Gibbs family. The Gibbs' lived on a grand scale and spent lavishly on opulent furnishings for their magnificent mansion, including its stunning private chapel.

When the house was saved for the nation in June 2002, it needed a huge amount of conservation work, which still continues with parts of the house not open to the public. Visitors are no longer restricted to guided tours only and can see this work in progress as they wander at will through the permitted areas. Outside, there are formal gardens, an arboretum, walled garden and a working kitchen garden. Admission to the house is by timed ticket. Tickets are issued at visitor reception on arrival and cannot be booked.

Also at Wraxall is **Noah's Ark Zoo Farm**, a hands-on real working farm with a rare collection of more than 100 types of animals, including meerkats, camels, rhinos, wallabies, monkeys and giraffes. There are also 12 all-weather playgrounds and a huge indoor play barn. Daily events include animal shows, tractor rides, bird of prey displays and keeper talks.

HENBURY

4 miles NW of Bristol off the A38

🏰 Blaise Castle

In her novel *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen described **Blaise Castle** at Henbury as "one of the finest places in England". This impressive 18th-century house is set in parkland and boasts a large collection of everyday objects from the past, including model trains, dolls and toy soldiers. There's also a Victorian schoolroom, picture gallery and period costumes. Within the estate grounds is Blaise Hamlet, an impossibly

📖 stories and anecdotes 🐡 famous people 🎨 art and craft 🎭 entertainment and sport 🚶 walks

picturesque group of nine detached and individual stone cottages designed in a romantic rustic style by John Nash in 1809. The cottages are owned by the National Trust but are not open to the public.

Bath

 Roman Baths	 Thermae Bath Spa
 Bath Abbey	 'Beau' Nash
 Holburne Museum	 Royal Crescent
 Pump Room	 Theatre Royal
 Museum of East Asian Art	 Pulteney Bridge
 Assembly Rooms	 Fashion Museum
 Museum of Bath at Work	
 Bath Postal Museum	 Jane Austen Centre
 Herschel Museum of Astronomy	
 Bath Skyline Walk	
 Prior Park Landscape Garden	

Designated a World Heritage City, Bath is Britain's finest Georgian city, replete with gracious buildings of which around 5000 are listed because of their architectural merit. Set in a sheltered valley, it is surrounded like Rome by seven hills, which may have been one reason why the Romans took to it with such enthusiasm. Another important reason was, of course, its natural hot springs.

Since time immemorial more than half a million gallons of water a day, at a constant temperature of 46°C, have bubbled to the surface at Bath. The ancient Celts believed the mysterious steaming spring was the domain of the goddess Sulis and they were aware of the water's healing powers long before the invasion of the Romans. However, it was the Romans who first enclosed the spring and went on to create a spectacular health resort that became known as Aquae Sulis. By the 3rd

century, Bath had become so renowned that high ranking soldiers and officials were coming here from all over the Roman Empire. Public buildings and temples were constructed and the whole city was enclosed by a stone wall. By AD410, the last remaining Roman legions had left and, within a few years, the drainage systems failed and the area returned to marshland. Ironically, the ancient baths remained hidden throughout the entire period of Bath's 18th-century renaissance and were only discovered in the late 19th century. The restored Roman remains can be seen today. They centre around the **Roman Baths**, a rectangular lead-lined pool standing at the centre of a complex system of buildings that took over 200 years to complete. It comprised a swimming pool, mineral baths and a series of chambers heated by underfloor air ducts.

One hundred yards from the Great Bath, the **Thermae Bath Spa** opened in the summer of 2006. Visitors can bathe in the natural thermal waters that the Romans enjoyed almost 2000 years ago. There's a spectacular rooftop pool, an innovative series of steam rooms, and an extensive range of spa treatments are available.

In a city crammed with beautiful buildings, **Bath Abbey** is still outstanding. The present great church was begun in 1499, after its Norman predecessor had been destroyed by fire. Building work was halted at the time of the Dissolution in the 1540s and the church remained without a roof for 75 years. It was not finally completed until 1901. It is now considered to be the ultimate example of English Perpendicular church architecture.

Inside, there is a memorial to **Richard 'Beau' Nash**, one of the people responsible for turning Bath into a fashionable Georgian spa town. Prior to Nash's arrival in the early

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Royal Crescent

18th century, Bath was a squalid place with farm animals roaming the streets within the confines of the old Roman town. Notwithstanding, the town had continued to attract small numbers of rich and aristocratic people. Eventually, the town authorities took action to improve sanitation and their initiative was rewarded in 1702, when Queen Anne paid Bath's spa a visit. The elegant and stylish Beau Nash, who had only come to the town to earn a living as a gambler, became the Master of Ceremonies and, under his leadership, the town became a relaxing place for the elegant and fashionable of the day's high society. Among the entrepreneurs and architects who shared Nash's vision was the architect John Wood who, along with his son, designed many of the city's fine neoclassical squares and terraces. Among these is the **Royal Crescent**, John Wood the Younger's Palladian masterpiece and one of the first terraces in Britain to be built to an elliptical design. It has now been designated a World Heritage Building. Open to the public, No 1 Royal Crescent has been restored, redecorated and furnished so that it appears as it might have done when it was first built.

Bath's other 18th-century founding father was Ralph Allen, an entrepreneur who made his first fortune developing an efficient postal system for the provinces, and who went on to make a second as the owner of the local quarries that supplied most of the honey-coloured Bath stone to the city's Georgian building sites.

Famed for its wealth of Georgian architecture, Bath is a delightful city to wander around. Beside the original Roman Baths is the **Pump Room**, which looks much as it did when it was completed in 1796. The **Theatre Royal** is one of Britain's oldest and most beautiful theatres and offers a year-round programme of top quality drama, opera, dance and frequent Sunday concerts. Spanning the River Avon, in the centre of the city, is the magnificent **Pulteney Bridge**, designed by Robert Adam and inspired by Florence's Ponte Vecchio with its built-in shops.

The National Trust-owned **Assembly Rooms**, one of the places where polite 18th-century society met to dance, play cards or just be seen, were severely damaged during World War Two and not re-opened until 1963. They now incorporate the interesting **Fashion Museum** with a collection of more than 30,000 original items illuminating the vagaries of fashion over the past 400 years.

This is just one of the city's many excellent museums. Currently closed for refurbishment and not due to re-open until 2011, the **Holburne Museum** is housed in one of the city's finest examples of Georgian architecture and set in beautiful gardens. Originally a spa

hotel, it was converted into a museum in the early 20th century and now contains the superb collection of decorative and fine art put together by Sir William Holburne in the 19th century. Landscapes by Turner and Guardi, and portraits by Stubbs, Ramsey, Raeburn, Zoffany and Gainborough, are among its many treasures. The **Museum of Bath at Work** holds a fascinating collection that chronicles the city's unique architectural evolution; the **Museum of East Asian Art** displays artefacts from China, Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia; and the **Bath Postal Museum** illustrates 4000 years of communication from "clay-mail to e-mail" and has a reconstruction of a Victorian sorting office.

The city is closely associated with Jane Austen and her novels and, at the **Jane Austen Centre**, enthusiasts can learn more about the Bath of her time and the importance of the city to her life and works. Another famous resident is celebrated at the **Herschel Museum of Astronomy**, which occupies the mid-Georgian house where the famous astronomer and musician lived in the late 1700s and where he made his discovery of the planet Uranus.

An ideal way to gather a general impression of this magnificent city is to take the **Bath Skyline Walk**, an eight-mile footpath, through National Trust-owned land, taking in some superb landscaped gardens and woodland to the southeast of the city and from where there are extensive views out over Bath. The most striking feature of the skyline is Beckford's Tower, which was built for the eccentric William

Beckford in 1827. There are yet more magnificent views of the city from another National Trust property, **Prior Park Landscape Garden**, which is just a 10-minute walk or short bus ride from the city centre – there is no parking at the garden itself. Within the beautiful grounds of this intimate 18th-century garden are three lakes set in sweeping valleys, and a famous Palladian bridge, one of only four of its kind in the world.

Around Bath

DYRHAM

7 miles N of Bath off the A46

 Dyrham Park

Set in an extensive deer park just minutes from the M4, **Dyrham Park** (National Trust) is a spectacular Baroque mansion containing a fabulous collection of 17th-century furnishings, textiles, paintings and Delftware reflecting the taste for Dutch fashions at the time it was built. Visitors can wander round the park with its woodlands and formal garden, and discover how Victorian servants worked 'below stairs'.



Deer at Dyrham Park

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BATHFORD

3 miles NE of Bath off the A363

 Eagle House  Brown's Folly

 Bathampton Down

This residential community once belonged to Bath Abbey. Among the many fine 18th-century buildings to be seen here is **Eagle House**, a handsome residence that takes its name from the great stone eagle that stands with its wings outstretched on the gabled roof. On the hill above Bathford, there is a tall Italianate tower known as **Brown's Folly** built following the Napoleonic Wars to provide local craftsmen with work during the economic depression of the 1830s.

To the west lies Bathampton whose church is the last resting place of Admiral Arthur Phillip, the first governor of New South Wales, who took the initial shipload of convicts out to the colony and established the settlement of Sydney. He is regarded by some as the founder of modern Australia. A chapel in the south aisle, known as the Australian Chapel, contains memorials to the admiral's family.

Above the village lies **Bathampton Down**, which is crowned with an ancient hillfort that, according to some historians, was the site of the 6th-century Battle of Badon in which the forces of King Arthur defeated the Saxons.

CLAVERTON

2 miles E of Bath on the A36

 Claverton Manor

 American Museum in Britain

Just to the west of the village stands the 16th-century country mansion, **Claverton Manor**, bought in 1764 by Ralph Allen, the quarry-owning co-founder of 18th-century Bath. The mansion that Allen knew has been

demolished, leaving only a series of overgrown terraces, but some of the stone from the old house was used in the construction of the new mansion on the hill above the village. It was here, in 1897, that Sir Winston Churchill is said to have given his first political speech. Claverton Manor is best known as the **American Museum in Britain**. Founded in 1961, it is the only establishment of its kind outside the United States. The rooms of the house have been furnished to show the gradual changes in American living styles from the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the 17th century, to New York of the 19th century. The arboretum contains a collection of native American trees and shrubs.

HINTON PRIORY

3½ miles SE of Bath off the B3110

 Stoney Littleton Long Barrow

All that remains of the early Carthusian monastery founded here by Ela, Countess of Salisbury, are atmospheric ruins. As in other religious houses belonging to this order, the monks occupied their own small dwellings set around the main cloister, often with a small garden attached. These communities were generally known for their reclusiveness. However, one outspoken monk from Hinton Priory, Nicholas Hopkins, achieved notoriety in Tudor times as the confessor and spiritual adviser to the 3rd Duke of Buckingham and his story is recounted by Shakespeare in *Henry VIII*. Several sections of the old priory remain, including the chapter house, parts of the guest quarters and the undercroft of the refectory.

Close by can be found one of the finest examples of a Neolithic monument in the west of England, **Stoney Littleton Long Barrow** (English Heritage), built more than

4000 years ago. This striking multi-chambered tomb has recently been restored following vandalism and the interior can be inspected by obtaining a key from nearby Stoney Littleton Farm.

FARLEIGH HUNGERFORD

5 miles SE of Bath on the A366

 Farleigh Hungerford Castle  The Peto Garden

This old fortified settlement is still overlooked by the impressive remains of **Farleigh Hungerford Castle** that stands on a rise above the River Frome to the northeast of the village. It was built by Sir Thomas Hungerford, the first Speaker of the House of Commons, on the site of an old manor house that he acquired in the late 14th century. Legend has it that Sir Thomas failed to gain the proper permission from the Crown for his

fortification and this oversight led to his downfall. The castle changed hands in the early 18th century and the incoming family saw it as a quarry for building stone rather than as a place to live. Much of the castle was left to go to ruin while the family built a new mansion on the other side of the village. Nevertheless, an impressive shell of towers and perimeter walls has survived intact, along with the castle's Chapel of St Leonard. This contains a striking 15th-century mural of St George, some fine stained glass and a number of interesting monuments, including the tomb of Sir Thomas Hungerford himself.

To the north, just inside Wiltshire, is Iford Manor, home to the **Peto Garden**, a Grade I listed Italian style garden famed for its tranquil beauty. A unique hillside garden, it was the creation of architect and landscape gardener

PITFOUR HOUSE

High Street, Timsbury, nr Bath, Somerset BA2 0HT
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Splendid food, convivial company and truly wonderful hospitality are to be found at **Pitfour House**, a contemporary English experience in a charming listed Georgian home. Situated in the countryside village of Timsbury, just 6 miles outside of Bath, Pitfour House dates from the 1790s and stands back from the High Street, with a wonderfully mellow stone façade. The surroundings are so picturesque and rural here it is easy to forget how close you are to so many great attractions and cities!

The delicious, expertly cooked modern menu at Pitfour House includes fresh home grown vegetables from the beautiful garden (when seasonal) and a wide selection of personally selected local ingredients. The 2 or 3 course dinners, as well as the hearty breakfasts, are served in the elegant dining room. Guests are also to relax during their stay in the cosy sitting room, and take in a little TV, or the even cosier snug, or enjoy the well maintained gardens, which can seem like a world away from the hustle and bustle of Bath! The two tastefully decorated bedrooms, one with ensuite shower, the other with a private bathroom have king size beds with top quality linen and towels providing all the amenities you need for your stay.



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Harold Peto, who lived at the manor from 1899 until 1933.

NORTON ST PHILIP

5½ miles S of Bath on the A366

 George Inn  Norwood Farm

In the 13th century, a group of Carthusian monks were given some land near here where they founded a Priory that was completed in 1232. The monks were also responsible for building the village's most famous landmark, the splendid **George Inn**, originally established as a house of hospitality for those visiting the priory. A wonderful fusion of medieval stonework, oriel windows and timber framing, it is still a hostelry today. The inn's timber framed upper floors were added in the 15th century when the inn doubled as a warehouse for storing the locally produced woollen cloth. In 1668, the diarist Samuel Pepys stayed here while on his way to Bath with his family and noted, "Dined well. 10 shillings." Just a short while later, the inn played host to the Duke of Monmouth, who made the George his headquarters shortly before his defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor in 1685. According to a local story, 12 men implicated in the uprising were imprisoned here after the battle, in what is now the Dungeon Bar. They were later taken away to be hanged, drawn and quartered at the local market place.

To the north of the village, **Norwood Farm** offers an introduction to the objectives and practicalities of organic farming. A Farm Walk takes in a recycling area, explains the use of wind turbines and provides a view of more than 30 rare and beautiful animal breeds including Saddleback pigs, Shetland ponies and Wiltshire Horn sheep. A café and farm shop on site make good use of the organic food produced on the farm.

KEYNSHAM

6½ miles NW of Bath on the A4175

 Avon Valley Country Park

A former industrial centre, Keynsham is now a dormitory town for Bristol. Despite its modern appearance, it has ancient roots. During the excavations for a chocolate factory, the remains of two Roman villas were discovered. These remains have since been incorporated into an interesting small museum near the factory entrance. In the late 12th century, an abbey was founded here, close to the River Chew, but it seems that the medieval monks were not as pious as they should have been. Eventually, they were banned from keeping sporting dogs, going out at night, employing private washerwomen and entertaining female guests in the monastery. Today, the abbey foundations lie under the bypass but the part 13th-century parish church has survived and, along with being a good example of the Somerset Gothic architectural style, it contains some impressive tombs to members of the Bridges family.

Much later, two large brass mills were established at Keynsham during the town's 18th-century industrial heyday, one on the River Avon and the other on the River Chew. Though production had ceased at both mills by the late 1920s, they are still impressive industrial remains.

Just to the east of Keynsham, **Avon Valley Country Park** provides a popular day out for families. There's a large adventure playground, indoor play area, friendly animals and pets corner, falconry displays, boating lake, 1½ mile nature trail walk, mini-steam train rides, land train rides, quad bikes, picnic and barbecue area, café and gift shop.

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