

## Dinder and Wells

**Distance:** 5.3 m / 7.5 km leisurely walking

**Total ascent:** 145m

**In Pursuit of Spring:** Chapter 8 Shepton Mallet to Bridgwater

**Refreshments:** Numerous places in Wells

**Map:** Explorer 141

### Getting there:

If driving, come off the A371 and drive forward, until the junction with Church Road on the left is reached. Park outside the parish church of St Michael and All Angels (575:446).

*The road climbed away from Croscombe up the left wall of the valley, both at the ridge and on the slope of Dulcote Hill. The river runs parallel on the right beneath, and along its farther bank the church and cottages of Dinder in a string; and the sole noise arising from Dinder was that of rooks.*

Dinder, which means 'the house in the village', is secluded settlement lying on the southern Mendips between Shepton Mallet and Wells. It originally belonged to the Bishop of Bath and Wells and changed hands many times, eventually passing by marriage into the Somerville family. It lies in limestone country between the Sheppey River and the Mendips and is primarily earthed in its pastoral agricultural history. Its houses date back to Tudor and Georgian times.

The cruciform church of St Michael and All Angels, begun in Norman times, modified in the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, was restored in 1872. It has Norman dragon carving reset above the south chapel window; this, as with the carvings of angels, probably relate to the patron saint Michael and his Satan-defeating role. There are numerous memorials, many to the Somervilles, including one to James Somerville who served with distinction in both World Wars. Having assisted in the Dunkirk evacuation he was given the task of destroying the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in 1940. He became Admiral of the Fleet and was later Lord Lieutenant of Somerset.

Riverside, where the river has been canalised, used to contain the post office and school. Its cottages are 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dragon House hangs an image of a green dragon over a wheel. This features in the Somerville crest and may relate to the legendary slaying of the predatory Dinder Worm (or dragon, as in the Northumbrian Lambton Worm) by Bishop Jocelin of Wells (died 1242).



St Michael and All Angels Church, Dinder

1. Facing the church, a road, with a wall plaque stating 'Public footpath to Wells', leads off to the right. Follow this. Walk between the cottages.

2. At the end of the houses on the right will be a gate and kissing gate on to an unmade way to a cricket pavilion. Go through the kissing gate, turn sharp left and walk westwards and through a metal gate by a telegraph pole.

3. Walk ahead over to a kissing gate in a hedge. Go through it and bear left to the trees screening the River Sheppey and go over a footbridge with a gate at either end.

4. Turn right, walk along the hedgerow and through a kissing gate. Continue walking forward and along the hedgerow towards Dulcote, the roofs of which can be glimpsed ahead.

5. At the end of the field, follow the path to the left and through a wooden kissing gate into another field. Go ahead with the village coming into sight. Go through the metal kissing gate next to a field gate which will take you on to the main Dulcote road. Follow this to the left and up to a grass triangle with a water-feature in the centre.

6. Turn right, passing the 1860 school-chapel on the left (now a private residence) and go down Dulcote main street .

7. Pass the 17<sup>th</sup> century Manor Farm and Walnut Cottage. After this and just before Dulcote House take the



Dulcote Hill, 1912

All the time, we are walking parallel to Thomas's cycle route. Off to the right lies the southern ridge of the Mendips and to the left is the tree-clad whaleback *ridge and ... slope of Dulcote Hill*. This is a southern outcrop of the Mendip Hills, and is a carboniferous mass surrounded by younger Triassic formations. It has a complex folded structure of upright and folded-over strata. Its 18-acre quarry cut out of its southern side, reached peak production of railway ballast and road-making aggregate in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and was served by the Great Western Railway. Complaints of overworking and public and political pressure against its post-war development, which would have removed half of the hill, resulted in its decline. It is now a food-processing site. Currently extensively wooded, post cards of Edward Thomas's day show it as far less so.

The River Sheppey was formerly known as the Doultin and it may be embodied in Dulcote's earlier name of 'Dultingcote' – shelters /cottages by the river. An alternative meaning could come from 'dal' meaning valley and 'cot' meaning shelter. Dulcote was always dependent on agriculture. The number of its farms has been reduced to two dairy farms. Rag-based paper was produced in two Dulcote mills on the River Sheppey, first documented in 1752 and running till 1898, after which leather board for the shoe industry was made. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1904.

footpath on the right between the gardens.

8. A gate and stile lead into a field ahead. Walk slightly left to a fingerpost in the hedge and cross the stile. Follow the righthand hedge to a stile-footbridge-stile over a brook.

9. Go over the field to a stile by a gate opposite and on to a cross-track junction. Opposite and to the left, take the stile into a larger field. In Summer this will be planted; the object is to make a way to a stile by a gate next to Park Wood.

10. Walk along the lefthand hedgerow towards the end of the field. In front of this view is a gate. Go through this and continue alongside the lefthand hedge.

11. Follow this, walking ahead. At the end by a field gate and to the right are two gates. Go through these and, by another gate, onto the road.

12. Walk ahead along the moat path by the Bishop's Palace.



Wells moat (three photographs), Edward Thomas



Dulcote Water fountain

Thomas continues: *At a turning overshadowed by trees, at Dulcote, a path travels straight through green meadows to Wells, and to the three towers of the cathedral at the foot of a horizontal terrace-like spur of oak, pine and beech, that juts out from the main line of Mendips leftwards or southwards. The river, which follows that main line up to this spot, now quits it, and follows the receding left wall of its valley, and consequently my road had its company no longer. My way lay upward and over the spur. The white footpath was to be seen going comfortably below on the left through parklike meadows, and beyond it, the pudding-shaped Hay Hill and Ben Knowle Hill, and the misty dome of Glastonbury Tor farther off.*



The Cathedral lies ahead.

This is now the Monarch's Way (554:452).

The city lies to the south of the sandstone Pen Hill (site of the television transmitter) and between the Mendip carboniferous limestone outcrops. Originally a Roman settlement, the Saxon Ine of Wessex built a collegiate minster here in 704. It became a bishopric in 909 but its episcopal seat was later removed to Bath and bitter argument

between the two religious communities led to the creation of the See of Bath and Wells in 1245.

*I came to the palace and the moat that flows along one side, between a high wall climbed by fruit trees and ivy, and a walk lined with pollarded elms. Rooks inhabited the elm tops, and swans the water. Rooks are essential to a cathedral anywhere, but Wells is perfected by swans. On the warm palace roof behind the wall – a roof smouldering mellow in the sun – pigeons lay still ecclesiastically. Sometimes one cooed sleepily, as if to seal it canonical that silence is better; the rooks cawed, the water foamed down into the moat at one end between the bowery walls. Away from the cathedral on that side to the foot of the Mendips expanded low, green country. I walked along the moat into the Shepton road, and turning to the left, and passing many discreet, decent, quiet houses such as are produced by cathedrals, and to the left again, so made a circuit of the cathedral and its high tufted walls and holly trees, back to the market place.*



Streams in the hills to the north east of the city emerge in wells, known as St Andrew's Risings, at the Bishop's Palace (feeding its moat) before joining the Sheppey at Coxley. The city takes its name from these water sources. The moat-fronted defensive walls have turrets at each corner and a gatehouse and drawbridge. They were constructed in 1341 by Ralph of Shrewsbury who had a fractious relationship with the townsfolk. The moat encircles the palace by five walls. The Bishop's Palace was begun by the native Bishop Jocelin who emparked the adjacent land and built schools and hospitals. The great hall was added c 1280. This was pillaged for building materials during the Reformation and it fell into disrepair. Garrisons occupied the palace during the Civil War and in the later Monmouth Rebellion.

The gardens were landscaped by Bishop Law (1761 – 1845) who also rebuilt and extended much of the palace. The Bishop's





Bishop's Palace gardens



Wells Market Place

**13. At the end, go through the medieval gate into Market Place.**

**14. Having faced into Market Place, go through Penniless Porch off to the right and enter the Cathedral Close.**

Palace and gardens, like the Cathedral also, are open to the public.

*The marketplace, too, was warm; the yellowish and grayish and bluish walls, the windows of all shapes and sizes, and the water of the central fountain, answered the sun. Two gateways lead out of one side of the marketplace to the cathedral and the palace grounds.*

When in the marketplace, Thomas says, *I actually entered an old furniture shop, and looked over a number of secondhand books, Spectators, sermons that were dead, theology that had never been alive, recent novels preparing for their late sleep.... A cat slept in the sun amongst them, curled superbly, as if she had to see justice done to the soporific powers of the cathedral city and the books that nobody wanted.*

A search of *Kelly's Directory* indicates, among the beer retailers, dressmakers, motor engineers, grocers and paper makers of Wells was an 'antique furniture dealer', Sidney Squire's, at 7 Marketplace – a likely home for the comfortable cat. At that time, the Red Lion, at what was then 2 Marketplace, was a temperance hotel. This may have been *the restaurant ... full of farmers, district councillors and their relatives, and several school children* where, while reading his just-purchased *The History of Prince Lee Boo*, Thomas observed the girl of *frank enthusiasm* who admired *lovely hair* and was curious about caning in schools. The Palace Gate – or Bishop's Eye – into Market Place was built by Bishop Beckynton in 1451. He also built the Penniless Porch which leads on to Cathedral Green. The latter is marked by the symbol of a barrel and a flame – 'beacon tun', a punning play on his name. At the same time, Beckynton conducted water to the citizens of Wells via the Well House, the flow from which runs down the High St from Market Place. Here the current water fountain replaces Beckynton's.

*The oblong green, walled in on three sides by homely houses, and by the rich towered west front on the fourth, echoed gently with the typical cathedral music, that of the*



Penniless Porch



West Front and Cathedral Green St

*mowing-machine, destroying grass and daisies innumerable, with a tone which the sun made like a grasshopper's, not out of harmony with the song of a chaffinch asseverating whatever it is he asseverates from one of the bordering lime trees.*

The 12<sup>th</sup> century cathedral was completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was built largely from local stone. Striking features are the west front, the fan-vaulting, the spectacular scissor buttresses at the head of the nave and supporting the central tower, the Chapter House with its many carvings and the gracefully curving foot-worn stairs that lead up to it.

Inside the cathedral, Thomas *heard the remote, monotonous priest's voice in the Benedicite, and the deep and high responses of the men and boys. Up there and in the transepts and choir chapels are many rich tombs and recumbent figures overarched by stone fretwork; but the first and lasting impression is of the clean spaciousness of the aisles and nave, clear of all tombs and tablets.*

In the Civil War, parliamentary troops stabled their horses in the nave and much of the statuary was slighted by firing practice. In 1685 Monmouth's troops damaged the west front, smashed windows and stripped the roof of lead for bullets. Later, after defeat at Sedgemoor, some of the peasant troops were imprisoned in the palace where Bishop Ken ministered to them and, uselessly, asked Judge Jefferies to treat them humanely. A day's trial led to 542 men being condemned, 94 to death. A blue plaque on Barclay's Bank in the Market Square recalls this.

### 15. Walk across the west front.



Harry Patch's funeral, BM

Ahead is the Wells and Mendip Museum, founded by pioneering caver and archaeologist Herbert Balch, houses local geological and historical material. Here, too, is the sarsen stone memorial to Harry Patch (1898 – 2009), the last fighting Tommy, whose funeral service was held here in Wells Cathedral. As the crowds lined this street to see the hearse leave for burial, they applauded with cries of "Well done, Harry!"

**16. Turn right along the Cathedral Green street**



Cathedral north side and clock, BM

From this point the exterior of the north transept is visible with the Chapter House over to its left.

On the wall face is the exterior of the astronomical clock, the mechanism of which dated back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Thomas writes, *By ten o'clock I was in the cathedral and saw the painted dwarf kick the bell ten times with his heel, and the knights race round and round opposite ways, clashing together ten times, while attendant squires rode in silence.*

The clock was installed by Bishop Ralph Erghum who had fitted a similar one in Salisbury Cathedral. The interior face as seen by Thomas shows the sun and moon revolving round the fixed earth on a 24-hour clock and demonstrates early ideas about the relationship between the three bodies. The outside clock, many times restored since its medieval construction, is driven by the same mechanism which also drives the bell-striking knights above it. Today it is powered by electricity.



Vicars' Close

**17. Go under the archway.**



The Rib, BM

On the left is Vicars' Close, reputed to be Europe's oldest residential street and completed by 1363 as accommodation for the chantry priests. Entered by an arch with a hall above, it houses 27 homes (originally 42 one-up one-down homes and some built in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century) with a 1420s chapel and library at the far end. The roof and chimneys were constructed later. Each had fireplaces, piped water and sanitary facilities at the rear. The vicars entered the cathedral by the elevated passage over St Andrew's St. Gardens were added in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century. No 22, restored in 1863, is closest to the original medieval appearance. The close houses Cathedral employees, particularly those associated with its music.

**The Rib**, on the right, home to novelist Elizabeth Goudge, is a hall house originating in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with later additions. It was a canonical residence. The north porch, visible from the road, dates to between 1464 and 1484.

**18. Walk up St Andrew's St.**

19. Crossing to the pavement, turn right down Tor St, walking past the labourers' cottages.

20. On the left, walk into a wide drive, Torhill Lane. A few metres on and on the right through the retaining wall, follow the finger post and go up the steps on to Tor Hill.

21. Continue up the steps and path to the top. Ignore the path of to the left and walk forward, through a wooden gate set in a stone wall, on to the East Mendip Way which will be the route as far as the woods above Dinder.

22. Follow the EMW to a kissing gate. The track leads to a more open stretch. Continue on the main path through a predominantly ash wood and through a kissing gate.

23. Coming to a fork, the track appears to go left. But take the path on the right, following the hedge.



Tank traps, Author

24. Go over the stone stile into the lane. Turn left and walk ahead, ignoring the kissing gate on the right.

25. Carry on along the EMW track.

26. Walking forward till a post on the left is reached, signing the East Mendip Way and restricted byway. Opposite this and down on the right, leave the EMW and go through the gate into Dinder Estate woodlands. The track has the golf course on the right and

Thomas calls these homes *discreet, decent, quiet houses*. The function of these is suggested by the current names relating to cobblers, a Penny School, bakehouse and laundry.



Cathedral from East Mendip Way, Author

Eventually this will lead past a defensive line of large concrete blocks, part of the defence system built between 1940 – 1941 as a tank trap.

Pause at a gate on the right for a fine view of the Somerset Levels and the distinctive Glastonbury Tor with its tower.



The Wells Golf Club will be on the left and, further on, to the right. On the left among the trees and set back from the track is an



then curves left through coppiced hazel clumps.

27. Leave the woods through a gate and walk forward along the wood edge to a further gate and ahead on to a stony pathway, downhill.

28. Go down to a track junction and right down towards Dinder, passing the lodge to Sharcombe Grange and Park on the left when the track becomes a tarmacked lane. The village hall is on the right and the starting point is reached.

information board for King's Castle Wood. On the summit of its oak and ash-covered hillside is an Iron Age settlement with protective enclosures.

Further tank traps are on the left and a decaying pill box on the right.

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