

## Cothelstone Hill

**Distance:** 5.2 miles / 8.3 km Total ascent 328m – leisurely walking with a strong uphill climb

**In Pursuit of Spring:** Chapter 10 The Grave of Winter

After wet weather, the path up to Cothelstone Beacon and the descent down will have muddy patches.

**Refreshments:** The Rising Sun, West Bagborough TA4 3EF (01823 432575)

**Map:** Explorer 140

*After passing Flaxpool, a tiny cluster of dwellings and ricks, with a rough, rising orchard, then a new-made road with a new signpost to Bridgwater, and then a thatched white inn called the Stag's Head, I turned off for West Bagborough, setting my face towards the wooded flank of Bagborough Hill. Bagborough Church and Bagborough House stand at the edge of the wood.*

**Getting there:** Trains run to Taunton, from where a bus service runs to West Bagborough.

If driving, and to follow Edward Thomas's route, follow the Taunton Rd (A358), and take the No Through Road on the left to Triscombe. The road entrance is on the opposite side of a B&B signed The Old Stag's Head.

Follow this upwards, past London Farm, to the T- junction. Turn right and go to Heathfield and turn left. Pass the church and war memorial. Park in the West Bagborough main street just before the Rising Sun pub.



The view from Cothelstone Hill, BM

*The village houses either touch the edge of the road, or, where it is very steep, lie back behind walls which were hanging their white and purple clouds of alyssum and aubretia down to the wayside water. Rain threatened again, and I went into the inn to eat and see what would happen. Thomas eavesdrops a conversation between two old men about the inadvisability of doing a stroke of gardening on a Good Friday, of the weather, the wonder of Half Moon biscuits which would plim out when dipped in the morning tea.*

*It was hot again at last as I climbed away from the valley and its gently sloping green and rosy squares and elmy hedges, up between high, loose banks of elder and brier, and much tall arum, nettle and celandine, and one plant of honesty from the last cottage garden. High as it was, the larch coppice on the left far up had a chiffchaff singing in it, and honeysuckle still interwove itself in the gorse and holly of the roadside.*

West Bagborough buildings of different ages and trackways declare that this is a sandstone area. It has had continuous occupation since the Bronze Age and the area abounds in cairns and barrows. In 2001, the 4<sup>th</sup> century West Bagborough Hoard of Roman silver from across the Empire was found. The village is mentioned in a charter of 854. Domesday has it as Bageberg – variously understood to mean ‘badgers’ hill’, the hill owned by an early Saxon family named ‘Baga’ or the Hill of the Beacon. After the Conquest, the de Mohun family held these lands as well as Dunster. It had a chequered history of ownership but eventually came into the Stawell Family, lords of Cothelstone Manor. The present village was relocated from its earlier cluster around the church and manor house to its present site in order to escape infection from the Black Death which had decimated the population.

St Pancras Church, like so many others, is a late medieval foundation, much restored in Victorian times.

Bagborough House dates from 1739 and has been owned continuously by the Popham family.

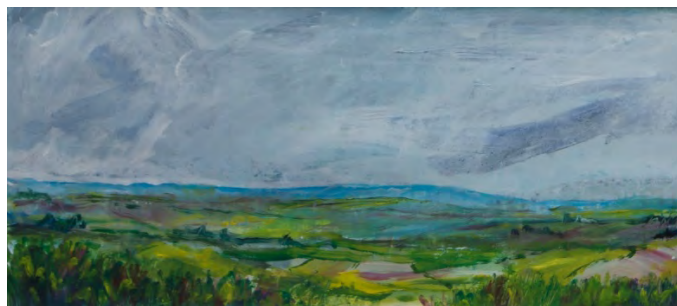
**1. Walk past the Rising Sun on the left.**



The Rising Sun, BM

The pub dates to 1573 and the door is the one used by Thomas and he would have seen the main ceiling beams. The interior he walked into was gutted by fire in 2002. It was refitted to a different design within a year.

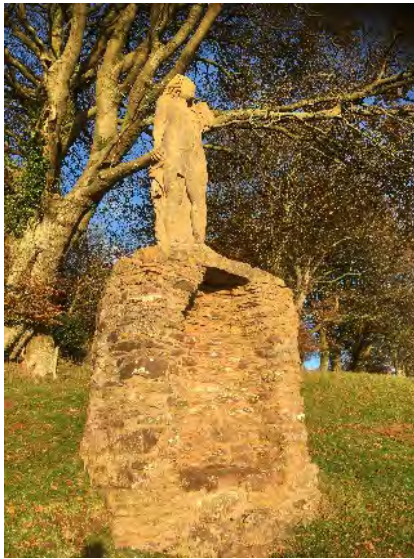
**2. Walk up the lane through the village, passing the old post office on the right and Higher House and continue forward, pausing occasionally to look back at the unfolding landscape. Ignore any lanes off to the right.**



The Brendon Hills, BM

**3. Pass Tilbury Farm on the left; shortly after, a gate lies between a group of elderly beech trees on the right. Go through this and walk downhill to the right to the purposeless statue and its impressive south-westerly view.**

*Both sides of the road there are lined with mossy banks and ash and beech trees, and deep below, southward, on the right hand, I saw through the trees the gray mass of Cothelstone Manor house beside its lake, and twelve miles off in the same direction the Wellington obelisk on the Black Down Hills. A stone seat on the other side of the trees commands both the manor house beneath and the distant obelisk.*



The Somerset Pan or Apollo BM

**Return to the road and the uphill forward route.**

**4. Shortly on the right are extensive views framed by two banded pillars of local stone (also to be found at the entrance to Tilbury Farm and, later, at Park End Lodge).**



The gateless pillars, BM

**5. Turn right at Birches Corner, continuing between the beech, sycamore, oak,**

*The seat is in an arched-over recess in the thickness of a square wall of masonry, six or seven feet in height and breadth. A coeval old hawthorn, spare and solitary, sticks out from the base of the wall. The whole is surmounted by a classic stone statue of an emasculated man larger than human, nude except for some drapery falling behind, long-haired, with left arm uplifted, and under its feet a dog; and it looks straight over at the obelisk. I do not know if the statue and the obelisk are connected, nor, if so, whether the statue represents the Iron Duke, his king, or a classic deity; the mutilation is against the last possibility. Had the obelisk not been so plainly opposite, I should have taken the figure for some sort of a god, the ponderous, rustic-classic fancy of a former early nineteenth century owner of Cothelstone Manor. The statue and masonry, darkened and bitten by weather, in that high, remote, commanding place, has in any case outgrown the original conception and intention, and become a classirustical, romantic what-you-please, waiting for its poet or prose poet. I should have liked very well, on such a day, in such a position, to think it a Somerset Pan or Apollo, but could not. It was mainly pathetic and partly ridiculous. In the mossy bank behind it the first woodsorrel flower drooped its white face among the primroses and green moschatel knobs; they made the statue, lacking ivy and moss, seem harsh and crude.*

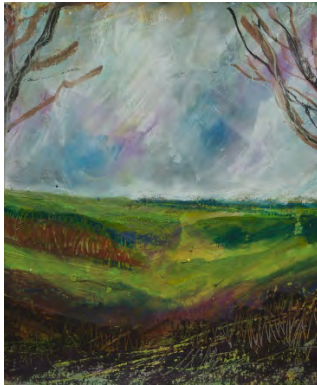
*Some way farther on, where the beeches on that hand come to an end, two high stout pillars, composed of alternate larger and smaller layers of masonry, stand gateless and as purposeless as the king, duke, or god.*

Hugh Warmington, the owner of Cothelstone, informed me: "The statue we believe to be Jupiter, though even the gender is unclear. My ancestor, Edward Jeffries, acquired the property in 1792 from a Philip Slocombe, who by all accounts was somewhat eccentric, and had a number (12?) of statues scattered across his park, of which one remains.

I am unsure about the [gateway with the] banded pillars, but as a boy I remember it was known as "Jubilee Gate". As it leads nowhere, I suspect it was another of Slocombe's conceits."



ash and may trees, up to the T-junction at Park End Lodge.



Birches Corner, BM

**6. Bear right to a footpath sign and gate to the left. This is a bridlepath; enter on to it (ignoring the path on the right) follow the track uphill. Pass through a kissing gate; the track broadens, emerging onto open moorland with a fenced prehistoric barrow ahead.**



From the top of Cothelstone Beacon, BM

**Follow the signed path ahead, to the left of the fenced mound and up to the bench hewn from a tree trunk. From here is Thomas's concluding 360° view described in *In Pursuit of Spring*.**



Park End Lodge

*For a while I rested in a thatched shed at the summit, 997 feet up, where the road turns at right angles and makes use of the ridge track of the Quantocks. A roller made of a fir trunk gave me a seat, and I looked down this piece of road, which is lined by uncommonly bushy beeches, and over at Cothelstone Hill, a dome of green and ruddy grasses in the south-east, sprinkled with thorn trees and capped by the blunt tower of a beacon. The primrose roots hard by me had each sufficient flowers to make a child's handful.*

From the Bagborough road Thomas says, *Turning to the left again, when the signpost declared it seven and three-quarter miles to Bridgewater, I found myself on a glorious sunlit road without hedge, bank, or fence on either side, proceeding through fern, gorse, and ash trees scattered over mossy slopes. Down the slopes I looked across the flat valley to the Mendips and Brent Knoll, and to the Steep and Flat Holms, resting like clouds on a pale, cloudy sea; what is more, through a low-arched rainbow I saw the blueness of the hills of South Wales. The sun had both dried the turf and warmed it. The million gorse petals seemed to be flames sown by the sun. By the side of the road were the first bluebells and cowslips ... [that] lay upon the grave of Winter. I was quite sure of that.*

The highest point, known as Cothelstone Beacon, is marked by a pile of stones, the remains of a collapsed late 18<sup>th</sup> century folly. It was built on top of an ancient Neolithic-Bronze Age funerary bowl barrow.

**7. Maintaining the previous direction, walk up to the hillock with its topping of stone remains.**

**8. Look right and take the wide green path, going down the gentle slope to the fence of Cothelstone Estate woodlands. Walk to the left till a stone trough is reached. Go through a kissing gate into the Cothelstone Estate woodlands.**

**9. Bear left at the immediate path-fork and follow to a broad track. Look for a waist-high marker on the right, indicating a downward route off to the right. At a broad track, turn right and follow the path downhill.**

**10 At all times, be guided by the Cothelstone Estate red signs indicating the public bridleway. Continue downhill, as directed, through the gate at the bottom on to the road and walk forward.**

**11 After a few hundred yards, on the right will be a signpost and gate leading to a medieval well.**

**After about ¼ mile, the gateway to Cothelstone Manor, barn and attendant farm buildings will be on the right. (Note the 1783 turnpike milestone to Bridgwater.)**

**12 Just after this, go through the kissing gate on the left of the manor house**



Cothelstone Beacon, BM

Such early constructions, well scattered in the Quantocks, are evidence of prehistoric beliefs, land use and social organisation. Selective tree felling is taking place to prevent root growth damaging the scheduled ancient monument of a Bronze Age rabbit warren. New trees are being planted away from the heritage site. The pillow mound, an artificial warren, was created to breed and farm rabbits as a food supply. Such practice was also popular in medieval times. A magnificent 360° can be gained from this point.



Agnes Cheyney's well, BM

Dating back to c 1500, this well is believed to have been built by Agnes Cheyney, the squire's wife. It was reckoned that on St Agnes's Eve (20 January) maidens could divine their future husbands and it has been associated with fertility rites.



Cothelstone Manor gateway, BM

**drive, across the field and over the stile onto the car park of Cothelstone Church. Pass through the gardens in front of the houses and follow the path to the church gate.**



Cothelstone Manor on the southwest slopes of Cothelstone Hill was given to the Conqueror's warrior Adam de Coveston, who later changed his name to Stawell. The family owned it till 1793. The present house was originally Elizabethan. In the Civil War its owner, the Royalist John Stawell, surrendered to Parliament, was imprisoned for high treason and Cromwell ordered the destruction of his family home by the cannons of 'General at Sea' Robert Blake of nearby Bridgwater. Little was left standing and it was abandoned. It was returned to Stawell at the Restoration. His son protested against Judge Jeffreys' punitive revenge after the 1685 Monmouth rebellion and refused to accommodate the judge, who vengefully hanged two rebels from the gateway main arch. The house became a farmhouse until it was purchased by the Esdaile family who rebuilt the Manor House, improved the farms and restored the parklands

**13 Go through the gate to the left of the church and follow the path (now part of the Quantock Greenway as well as the West Deane Way) to a line of poplar trees. The parkland pond will be on the left. Go through a gate and walk to a line of trees ahead. Go through a gate and on to a lane.**



St Thomas of Canterbury Church, BM

The gray, ironstone-tinged walls of the 12th century St Thomas of Canterbury Church has fine monuments to the Stawells and Esdailes. These two families have shared possession of Cothelstone and its estate for nigh on a thousand years. Poet Shelley's daughter lanthe married into the Esdaile family and her grave is in the churchyard.

**14 Go up the bank on the opposite side and through a gap in the hedge. As signed, walk diagonally to the left of a lone tree, to the righthand corner of the field.**



A Stawell monument, BM

**15 Pass the barrier on to the track leading up right and over a stile into Ternhill Lane. Go left up the hill as**

The West Deane Way is a 45-mile circular walk of contrasting interests.

far as small group of houses  
at Upper Ternhill on the  
right. Go through the gate  
immediately opposite and  
cross the two fields to a  
fenced strip in front of  
bungalows and to a  
gate/stile and the lane  
ahead.

16            Bear right on this  
and then left into the High St  
and the walk's start at the  
Rising Sun.

With thanks to Patsy Hudson and Wendy Britton, Bristol Ramblers, for their help with this  
walk

