

DISCOVER DORCHESTER

On foot

Walks and trails in and around Dorchester

Dorchester is a historic and vibrant town with beautiful places waiting to be discovered. Enjoy your adventures on foot with this guide.

To find out more about the places you have visited, other walks in the area, places to eat and much more, visit:

www.discoverdorchester.co.uk

The website and free app are like a tourist information centre in your pocket with information about upcoming events, places to visit and lots of other information to help you make the most of your time in Dorchester.

Click on the QR code to visit the website and download the app.



Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the leaflet is correct at the time of print, Dorchester Town Council cannot accept any responsibility for any errors or omissions. All persons carrying out these walks are doing so at their own risk.



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DISCOVER DORCHESTER

The Heart of Dorset



Walks around Dorchester



Walk 2

Poundbury to Maiden Castle

Distance: 5 miles
Terrain: Stiles, tracks and uneven ground

Maiden Castle in Dorset is one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hillforts in Europe - the size of 50 football pitches. Its huge multiple ramparts, mostly built in the 1st century BC, once protected hundreds of residents.

Start the walk in the Centre of Poundbury in **Queen Mother Square**. You will see a statue of the Queen Mother. Poundbury is an urban extension to Dorchester, according to principles of architecture and urban planning as advocated by HRH The Prince of Wales in his book *A Vision of Britain*.

Walk past the Garden centre and park to the **Buttercross**. An area filled with shops and cafes.

Head down Wadebridge Lane then turn left, following the path along the left hand side of Middle Farm Way.

Cross at the pedestrian crossing and walk past the vets to join Holmead Walk. This walk leads you to **Centenary Field** with a wooden play park.

Cross the field and find the footpath that leads right. Walk along this path and you should see a set of **allotments** on your right hand side.

At the end of this path it forks into three. Take the middle path which will lead you to an underpass under the **A35**.

You will emerge from the underpass into Farm land. Follow the path right adjacent to the A35.

Walk 1

Ratty's Trail

Distance: 1.5 miles
Terrain: Grass, farm tracks and pavements

From **Top of Town car park**, cross the road towards County Hall and follow the pavement around the outside on the Yeovil Road (B3157).

Cross the road at the steps down towards **Hangman's Cottage**, named after the hangman who lived here during the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685.

Cross over the Mill Stream and follow the path straight on until you meet **Blue Bridge** (which is blue).

At Blue Bridge, swans and their cygnets are frequent visitors and sometimes shoals of brown trout can be seen treading water near to the bridge.

Leaving the bridge, cross a couple of small footbridges and turn right across the fields. Sheep are grazed here so dogs on leads is essential. The view to Dorchester is impressive and reminds us that this is still a very rural area. Buzzards are often heard crying above and the occasional deer may be spotted.

Pass a small copse to your right and you are now walking on **Coker's Frome** Farm land where the Annual Dorchester Show is held.

The trail meets the main High Street by **Grey's Bridge**. Turn right here over the bridge, observing the important notice about transportation on the other side!

Beware of the traffic. Walk back towards the town until you reach the passage on your right, just before the **White Hart Pub**.

Map key

- P Car parking
- † Church



Walk 3

Dorchester to Thomas Hardy's Cottage

Distance: 7 miles.
Terrain: Can be quite muddy in places and walking boots or stout shoes are recommended.

Much of this route would have been walked by Thomas Hardy and were used as settings and inspiration for many of his works.

From **High East Street**, walk on the right side over **Grey's bridge**. Look out for the transportation sign on the bridge.

Ignoring the first footpath sign, you will soon see a road sign to Poole, Blandford and Ringwood. Opposite this you will see on your right a **bridleway sign**, a blue picture of a horse. Go through the gate and take the path, which will take you under the busy **bypass**. Follow the track straight ahead and after a noisy start you will soon reach more tranquil pastures.

A sign will give you the choice of going straight on, turning right to St Georges Road or left to **Stinsford**. By taking the left turn after a short distance you will reach Stinsford church. Stinsford Church it was here that apart from worshipping and playing in the choir, the Hardy family helped restore this 13th century church. Inside the church gate are the graves of the

Following the path the houses are built up to the riverbank here. If you are lucky you might see Ratty, but don't be alarmed, the River Frome is one of the most important rivers for water vole in Britain. Unlike the larger eared, longer tailed brown rat, the furry, small eared water vole lives in burrows along the riverbank. Like some of the residents of Dorchester, water voles like to keep their gardens well mown and eat a fresh supply of greens. They feed on grasses, sedges and other waterside plants.

Carry on along the riverbank back to Hangman's Cottage. There are plenty of benches to sit on and ponder the wildlife of the river before you return to your home.



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POOLE & BOURNEMOUTH

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Walk 1

A Roman Walk

45 - 60 minutes

Wheelchair and push chair friendly

Dorchester has evolved and changed many times over the centuries. At one point in its history it was the Roman town of Durnovaria and there are some fantastic remains from Durnovaria that can still be seen around the town today. Discover them, and more, on this walk.

From the Town Pump head west up the left hand side of High West Street following the orange line on the map to:

● **Judge Jeffreys Lodgings** 1 dates back to the 16th Century and is one of the oldest buildings in the High Street. In 1685 the infamous Judge Jeffreys stayed here while conducting his 'Bloody Assize' which saw many local people condemned to death for their part in the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion against King James II. Continue up High West Street with its many fine Georgian Buildings.

● **The Roman Wall** 2 that once surrounded Durnovaria can be seen here. It was originally 2.5 metres thick and stood 6 metres high. In the 18th Century the wall was replaced by tree-lined walks that continue to define the town's Roman perimeter.

● **Thomas Hardy's Statue** 3 commemorates Dorchester's most famous son and one of the great writers of English literature and poetry who lived from 1840 - 1928. His most popular works are probably *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The statue was unveiled in 1931 by Hardy's friend James Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*. The sculptor, Eric Kennington, overcame the author's lack of physical presence by showing him seated.

● **The Grove** 4 is the road located in a massive ditch forming part of the Roman town defences. It is likely that the walls and ditches were built to demonstrate the importance of the town as a 'civitas', or centre of administration, as well as to provide defence against attack.

Walk 2

A Town and River Walk

30 - 40 minutes

From the Town Pump head east down the right hand side of High East Street following the green line on the map to:

● **All Saints Church** 13 This is an important landmark along the High Street with its elegant spire. There are extensive wine vaults under much of the High Street and there is still talk of haunted underground passages. Cross High East Street and continue downhill.

● **Marliners Parade** 14 The Pale Ale Brewery sign is a reminder of the importance of this industry to the town over many centuries. Continue on past Tom Brown's pub and the Casterbridge Hotel to

● **The White Hart** 15 Now houses, this once was a popular gathering point for the carriers' carts in earlier times. It stands on the left by the bridge over the Mill Stream which flows through Fordington.

Turn left to walk alongside the Mill Stream (please read 7 and 8). For a pleasant diversion follow the boardwalk to the right of the Mill Stream to see the Riverside Nature Reserve. Eventually, turn left over the footbridge by Friary Cottage and walk up Friary Hill.

● **Chubb's Almshouses** 16 on the corner of North Square and Friary Lane is one of the oldest buildings still in use in Dorchester. This establishment dates its founding to the rebuilding of the town after the great fire of 1613 and today comprises four flats. Continue along Friary Lane and turn right on to High East Street at the end.

● **The King's Arms** 17 is an elegant bow-windowed 18th Century coaching inn which features by name in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The fastest coaches to London took about 16 hours - a travelling time reduced to about 6 hours when the railway reached Dorchester in 1847.

● **The Corn Exchange** 18 which dates from 1848, was originally built without the clock tower. This was added later thanks to Alderman Galpin but became known as Galpin's Folly as the townfolk were sure it would soon fall down. The building is home to the Council Chamber and Dorchester Arts.

● **The Roman Town House** 5 is the finest example of its kind in Britain. Discovered in 1937, it has been imaginatively conserved and displayed. Take time to explore and read the brilliant information boards.

● **The Hangman's Cottage** 6 covered by traditional Dorset thatch, this was the home of the town's executioner.

● **John's Pond** 7 legend has it that a prisoner named John drowned in this pond after escaping from the nearby gaol. The pond is part of the intricate drainage system of the water meadows which allowed low-lying areas to be flooded in the winter to stop the ground freezing and to allow for fertile silt to settle. In this way grass could be grown earlier in the spring for cattle and several breeds of Dorset sheep.

● **The Mill Stream** 8 is a branch of the River Frome which rises some 10 miles to the north west and flows into Poole harbour. Thomas Hardy referred to the Frome valley as 'The Vale of Great Dairies' and today it is still farmed and home to a variety of flora and fauna.

● **Hangings** 9 took place on top of an entrance to the gaol on the other side of the Mill stream. Large crowds would gather to witness the macabre spectacle and in 1856, at the age of 16, Thomas Hardy witnessed the hanging of Martha Brown for the murder of her husband. Located off North Square, Dorchester Prison was built on the site of a Norman Castle often frequented by King John.

● **The Rev. John White's House** 10 Known as the 'Parish of Dorchester', the Rector of St. Peter's and Holy Trinity from 1606 to 1648 was a dynamic preacher who used his personal authority to rapidly rebuild the town after the fire of 1613. He inspired the building of three almshouses and also played a crucial role in the early settlement of North America, including the founding of Dorchester, Massachusetts.

● **Grey School Passage** 11 One of the more tranquil places in Dorchester. Ahead is Holy Trinity Church which contains a memorial to John White.

● **Shire Hall Museum** 12 A spectacular Museum centred around the court where the Tolpuddle Martyrs were condemned in 1834 and many others were tried. English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy served as a magistrate at Shire Hall. In 1884 he was made Justice of the Peace for the Borough of Dorchester, sitting in court on almost forty occasions from then until 1919. Notice the distances to the nearest towns inscribed on the wall at a level for stage coach passengers to read.

Walk 3

A Thomas Hardy Walk

75 - 90 minutes

From the Town Pump walk south towards Antelope Walk following the blue line on the map.

● **Antelope Walk** 21 This beautiful shopping arcade was originally an 18th Century Coaching Inn and is mentioned by name in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

● **The Old Oak Room** 22 halfway along Antelope Walk, is reputed to be the room used by Judge Jeffreys for his infamous 'Bloody Assize' of 1685. Of 312 rebels tried by Jeffreys for supporting the Duke of Monmouth's attempt to seize the crown, a total of 74 were executed and 175 were transported to the Caribbean 'virtually as slaves'.

● **The Old Hospital and Roman Foundation** 23 A fine Victorian building that has recently been converted to apartments. On the corner of Somerleigh Road is a symbolic Roman fountain installed in 2003 near the point where a Roman aqueduct brought fresh water into Roman Durnovaria.

● **The Borough Gardens** 24 is one of the finest examples of its kind in the country. Major features include an ornate Victorian clock and tower, a delightful bandstand and a fountain.

● **Fairfield Market** 25 has been home to Dorchester's Wednesday market since 19th Century and is still very popular today.

● **Maumbury Rings** 26 was originally constructed as a Neolithic henge monument at least 4,500 years ago, probably by the inhabitants of Maiden Castle. The Romans made some major changes by lowering the central area and raising the banks to create an amphitheatre capable of holding 10,000 people. More changes were made during the Civil War when the site was fortified with cannon by local Parliamentary forces. The site is still used as the Romans intended, with outdoor performances and historical re-enactments.

● **Brewery Square** 27 is made up of fine Victorian brick buildings that were the home of Eldridge Pope Brewery since 1880. The area is now buzzing with shops, cafes, restaurants, entertainment and apartments.

● **The Cenotaph and Victorian Post Box** 28 These are situated close to the site of the southern gate in the Roman walls. The post box, an early one designed by Penfold, dates from 1866; the Cenotaph, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and made from Portland stone, was unveiled in 1921.

● **Barnes and Hardy Plaques** 29 can be seen at first floor level opposite the entrance to Hardy Arcade. Thomas Hardy's poem *The Last Signal* is a wonderful tribute to his friend William Barnes, whose school was here.

● **Napper's Mite** 30 was built as an almshouse by Sir Robert Napper to house 'ten old men' shortly after the great fire of 1613. This is the oldest building in South Street.

● **The Mayor of Casterbridge's House** 31 Currently a branch of Barclays Bank '...one the best, faced with dull red-and-grey old brick. The front door was open, and, as in other houses she (Elizabeth-Jane) could see through the passage to the end of the garden - nearly a quarter mile off' wrote Thomas Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.



● **South Walks** 37 In summer this elegant horse-chestnut lined Walk is arguably the most attractive in Dorchester. It marks the southern boundary of the Roman defences. Evidence of the outer rampart can still be seen on the far side of the road near the entrance to Sunninghill school.

● **The Roman Baths** 38 were excavated in 1978 before being carefully covered over by the car park and day centre. Go up the stairs to the right of Waitrose car park entrance (step free access is past the waitrose loading bay), walk straight ahead to the Tudor Arch. Take the lift or stairs down to the basement where there is an information board and red markings on the floor illustrating:

● **Neolithic Monument** 39 The large red discs mark the position of some of the five to six hundred huge wooden posts that made up an enormous circular monument that was built over 5,000 years ago. The area was large enough to contain ten full-sized football pitches and must have been of considerable importance in prehistoric times. Take the lift or climb the stairs to the first floor of Tudor Arcade where there is a:

● **Tudor Arch** 40 which once formed part of the yard of the ancient Greyhound Inn. There are also five panels located here telling the story of Dorchester down the ages. On the left we see an artist's impression of how the wooden henge might have been erected, there is also an impression of Roman Durnovaria, medieval Dorchester and finally 19th Century Dorchester (or Thomas Hardy's Casterbridge, if you prefer).



Walks around
Dorchester's
historic town
centre

Walk 4

A Gallows Walk

45- 60 minutes

From the Town Pump walk south down the left hand side of South Street following the red line on the map to:

● **Birthplace of Sir Frederick Treves** 32 (now Costa Coffee). The son of an upholsterer, Treves (1853-1923) attended the school run by William Barnes. A fine surgeon, he pioneered removal of the appendix and became surgeon to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. He rescued John Merrick, 'the Elephant man', from a freak show and wrote a book on the subject. He also wrote *Highways and Byways in Dorset*, which was first published in 1906.

● **Durmgate Street** 33 follows the line of the main Roman road through Durnovaria. Notice, near the Potter Inn, the plaque to the famous painter of Australian landscapes, Tom Roberts, who was born in this street. The statue of the Dorset Shepherd is a reminder of Dorchester's ongoing role as a market town with strong historic links to sheep and the wool industry.

Walk straight ahead and cross two main roads, The former Salvation Army Hall is on the right. Turn here to:

● **Salisbury Fields** 34 To the east of the Roman wall, a pleasant open park offers an excellent children's play area and provides a superb venue for a picnic for those in need of a break. There are views of St. George's, the parish church of Fordington. The beacon is used to mark important events, such as the Queen's Golden Jubilee and the Millennium New Year.

● **Gallows Hill** 35 was one of the main sites used for public executions. The gall once stood at the north end of Ican Way, where it joins the High Street. Condemned prisoners were offered a last drink at the Star, a pub opposite the Binsosar Museum. For a pleasant diversion to visit St. George's Church and Fordington Village Green, which date back to at least 1097, turn left and then retrace your steps.

● **The Dorset Martyrs Statue** 36 Completed in 1986, sculptor Elisabeth Frink's powerful bronze statues commemorate all those throughout Dorset who, down the ages, died for their faith. Two martyrs face the figure of Death across a circular plaque with a message 'For Christ and Conscience Sake'.