

**WALK 7**  
Abbotsbury

# Walk Dorset's History

🕒 **90 minutes to walk, sit and enjoy  
reading the information**



Stepping  
into  
nature

Welcome! As part of the Stepping into Nature project led by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Team, we have produced a series of self-guided walks.

These easy access routes highlight the local history, as well as other fun snippets of information that you will find along the route.

Further Information: [www.stepin2nature.org](http://www.stepin2nature.org)



### Distance

0.8 miles/1.2 km  
(optional hill further 0.6 miles / 1 km).



### Suggested time

90 minutes to walk, sit and enjoy reading the information.



### Difficulty

Flat and mostly tarmacked paths with optional steeper path up hill. Dog friendly.



### Facilities

Along route there are toilets and places for refreshments.

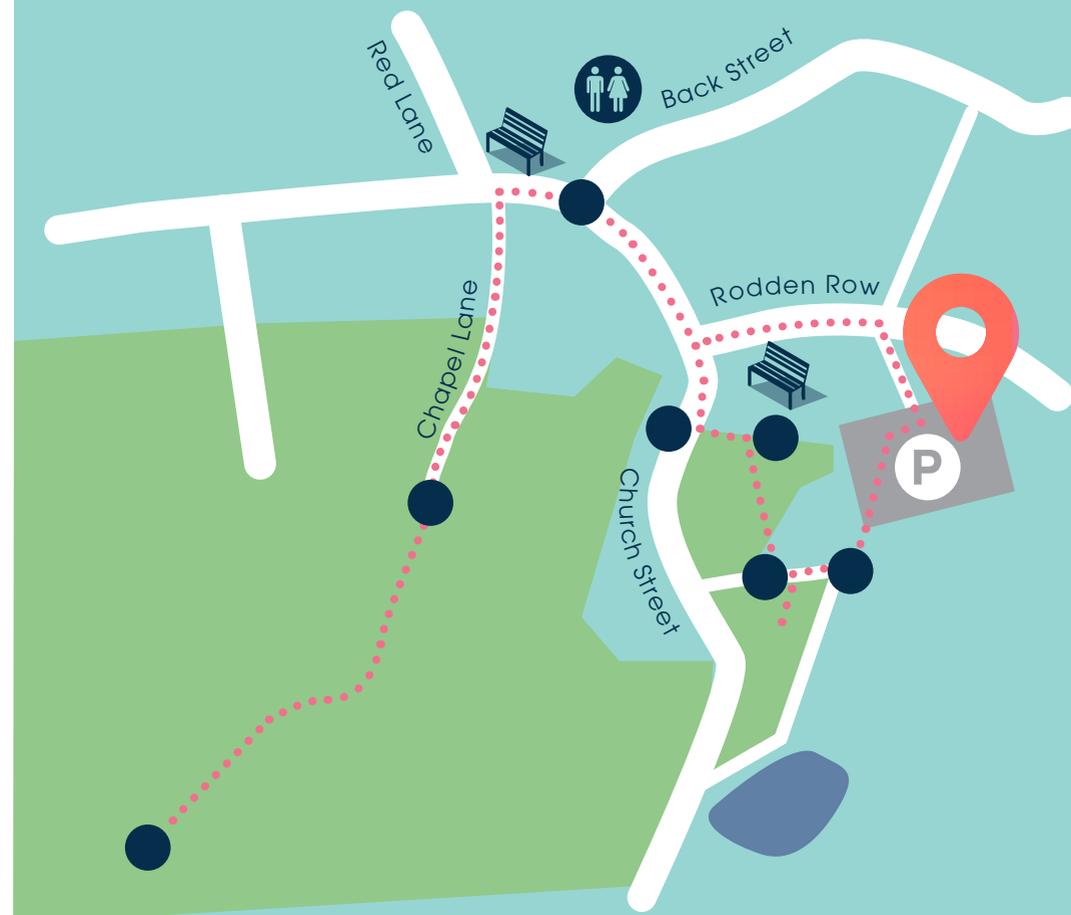


### Transport

Suggested parking at Rodden Row Car Park, charges apply. Bus stop in village centre.



# Route map



## Suggested starting point

Rodden Row Car Park, Abbotsbury, DT3 4JL



Points of interest



Seating



Parking



**Start in Rodden Row car park at the footpath in the far right corner from the entrance, see photo.**

Many people don't realise there was an abbey in Abbotsbury - though there is a clue in its name!

Abbotsbury Abbey was built around 1020 by Orc, one of the nobles of King Canute. It thrived for 500 years and a sprawling complex of support buildings grew. The abbey attracted people to live nearby - some working directly for the abbey, others providing services to it and its many visitors.

Let's go and look at the abbey.



Follow the path past Abbey House and stop when you reach the information board with the reconstruction drawing of the abbey.



You are now standing on the site of the abbey church amongst the former abbey complex.

Once the abbey went out of use in Henry VIII's time, many of the abbey buildings became quarries as locals made use of the quality stone to build houses. Those buildings that still had a use such as the Tithe Barn, were kept or converted for another use, such as the abbey's gatehouse (right of the Tithe Barn) which became a home.



**Look at the information board to see the immense scale of the abbey.**



Go down the path to look closer at the remains of the freestanding wall in front of you.

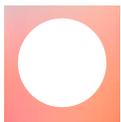




**You are looking at the gable end wall of one of the monastery buildings. Can you spot the fireplaces?**

The gable wall may have survived because it was reused in another building that has since been demolished, or perhaps it survived as it was furthest away from the entrance into the abbey, and therefore more effort to quarry. Do you have a guess as to why it survived?

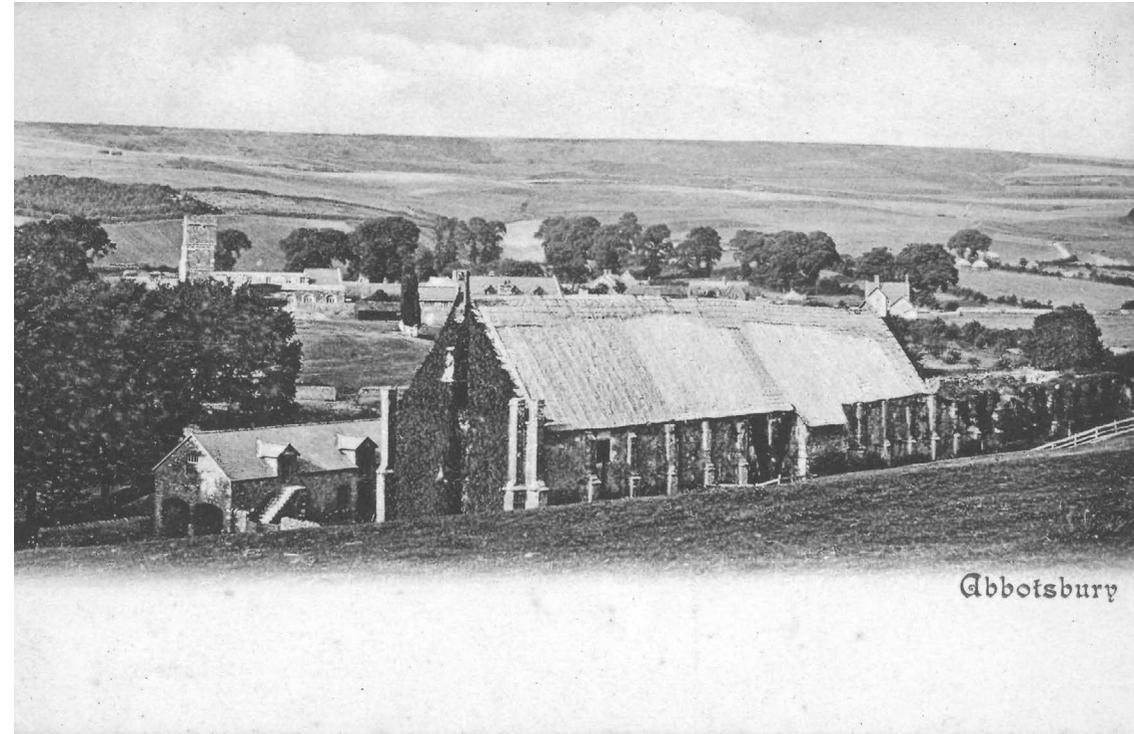
This photograph was taken from the road looking back through an entrance arch of the abbey to the gable wall. See how the gable wall was covered in ivy when this picture was taken 100 years ago.



Turn around to look at the Tithe Barn past the pond.

The Tithe Barn was built around 1400 and used by the abbey to store the produce of its lands – it was one of the biggest such barns in this country and shows how well organised and wealthy the monks were. What's more, what you see today is only half of the barn's original size.

In the old photo taken from the other side, you can see the unroofed wall of the other half on the right. Again, look at how all the walls were covered in ivy – very picturesque, but not good for the structure.



**Before heading on, take a moment to take in this stunning rural view.**



Return up the path and go through the gateway into the churchyard.

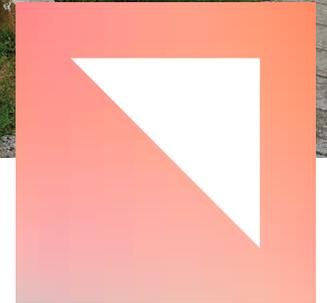
The parish church survived when the abbey church was demolished because it belonged to and was used by locals.

There are pieces of decorative stonework from the abbey lying around the churchyard in the walls on your right and even in the stonework all over the village. We even heard a few years ago about people in the village forming a group who went into each other's houses to see the bits of the abbey reused inside.

On the left, a few yards into the churchyard, is a narrow trench – this is where archaeologists found the north wall of the abbey church. It helps to give an idea of how this enormous building covered the whole 'plateau' behind you, towering over the parish church.



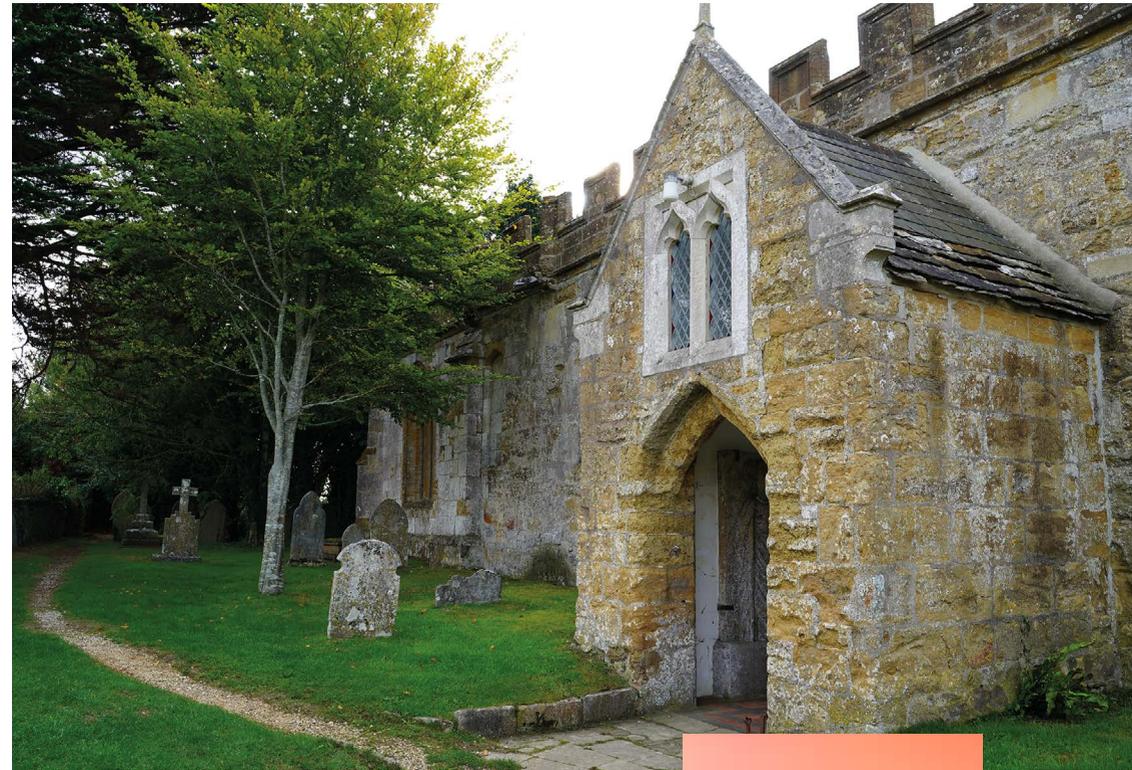
Follow the path around the church into the porch.



To your left is the tombstone of an abbot, the person in charge of the abbey. The style indicates it is from the 1200s. It was presumably found in the churchyard or nearby and put up here.

Go inside and look closely at the pulpit (raised stand) to find two tiny bullet holes! They are from a battle in 1644 during the English Civil War between the Strangways family and the villagers who supported the King and a military force supporting Parliament that came over from Dorchester.

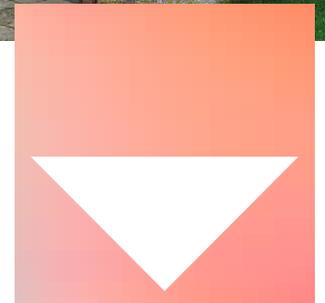
As part of this same battle, Abbey House (which we passed at the start of our walk) was set on fire causing an explosion that killed 50 looting Parliamentarians.



**Look at the information in the church for more items of interest.**

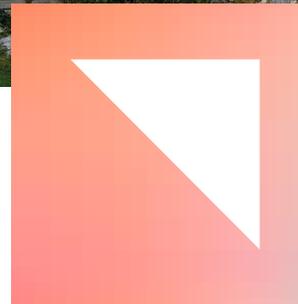


Leave the church and stop just before the gateway ahead.



From here you get a good view of where the abbey was (to your left) and where it is now (to your right) - in effect, the abbey has become the village!

Go through the gate, and in front of you is the Manor House, an ornate building with a distinctive two-storey projection at the front. This was likely the home of the Strangways family, built in the late 16th century - just after the abbey became a quarry!



Go right then straight ahead at the junction. When safe, cross to the other side of the road and stop at Strangways Hall.

Strangways Hall, now the village hall, and the house to the right were built in 1858 as the village school and schoolmaster's house. Built later than many other houses in the village, these had front gardens following the latest fashion.

Look at how many historic buildings there are in the village. While today we see Abbotsbury as a village, in the past it was more of a bustling town supported by the main coast road passing through it.



**What has changed since this photo taken 100 years ago?**  
**Clue - look at the spires!**



Continue along West Street. Turn left at Chapel Lane (just before the village shop) and follow it until the gate before the hill.



The parish church looks large today, however, it would have looked almost tiny compared to the abbey church next to it, which would have been twice as long, wide and high.

The hill on which St Catherine's Chapel stands is covered by contour strip lynchets – the artificial terraces constructed in the Middle Ages to enable people to grow crops on land that was otherwise too steep to plough. There are features that look similar on the hillside on the opposite side of the village, but geologists think that most of these features are just the result of land slippage.



**Look back across to the parish church and compare with this 100-year-old photo.**



If you wish to see St Catherine's Chapel up close then follow the path uphill. If not, we've got a photo of the building on the next page to save you the hill!

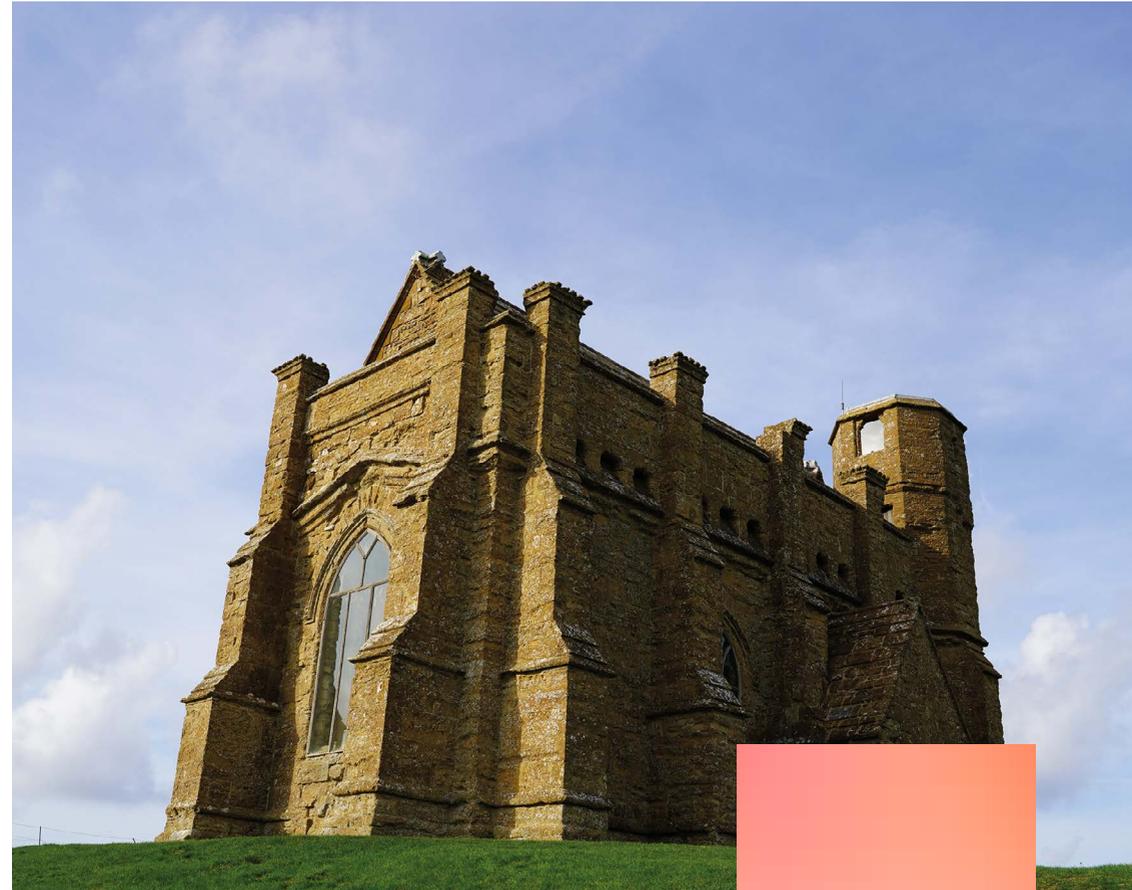


St Catherine's Chapel was built around 1400 for private prayer of monks and pilgrims and as a seamark to help sailors work out their location – St Catherine was the patron saint of seafarers. It survived as it was still valuable as a seamark after the abbey went out of use.

On a clear day, it is a great place to take in views along the Dorset coast, from Portland to the Devon border. Inland, there are several prehistoric round barrows (burial mounds) on the hilltop beyond Abbotsbury.



To return to the start, retrace your steps to West Street, turn right then down through the village. When you reach the sharp road bend you may like to divert from the previous route and go left along Rodden Road to view other interesting buildings. The car park entrance will be on your right.



# Looking for some more things to do?

## Picnic in the Parks

Discover new experiences and enjoy fun health and nature-related activities at Picnic in the Parks.

You can access all of the other History walks from this series as well as lots of other activities, films and resources to help you live well and love nature.

[picnicintheparks.org](http://picnicintheparks.org)



Explore the unique, varied, and outstanding natural beauty of this AONB which underpins its designation as a nationally important protected landscape.

[dorsetaonb.org](http://dorsetaonb.org)

Find new places to go, learn new skills and meet like-minded people through nature-themed activities held indoors and out.



[stepin2nature.org](http://stepin2nature.org)



# Stepping into Nature

Stepping into Nature opens opportunities for people to connect with Dorset's fascinating landscape, wildlife, history and culture, helping people live happier and healthier lives for longer.

Using Dorset's natural and cultural landscape, the project creates activities and sensory rich places for older people, people living with long-term health conditions, such as dementia, and their care partners.

The Stepping into Nature project is led by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Team, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.



A series of easy access routes  
highlighting local history and  
the stories around them.

Other routes include

**BLANDFORD FORUM**  
**CERNE ABBAS**  
**EASTERN DORCHESTER  
& FORDINGTON**  
**SHERBORNE**  
**SWANAGE**  
**WEYMOUTH**  
**BEAMINSTER**  
**BRIDPORT**  
**SHAFTESBURY**  
**STURMINSTER NEWTON**  
**WAREHAM**

Further Information

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