

WALK 9

Bridport

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



Distance

1.1 mile / 1.8 km.



Suggested time

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



Difficulty



Flat and tarmacked paths. Dog friendly.



Facilities



Public toilets available in South Street Car Park.



Refreshments available in the town centre.



Transport



Suggested parking at Rope Walks Car Park, charges apply. Bus stop in the town centre less than 5 minutes walk away from start point.

Route map



Suggested start point

Rope Walks Car Park, St Michael's Lane,
Bridport, DT6 3RH



Points of interest



Seating



Parking



Start at the lower end of the Rope Walks Car Park on St Michael's Lane.

The main streets of Bridport town form a T-shape which can be seen in this photo taken over 100 years ago before modern expansion - South Street in the middle and West and East Street on the right. South Street is the earliest part of the town dating from Saxon times. West and East Street were added several hundred years later, laid out along the Roman road that ran between Dorchester and Exeter.



On the skyline Colmers Hill can be seen but only as a bare cone as its iconic trees were planted after this photograph was taken.



Cross to the other side of St Michael's Lane and follow the path left until the junction with Foundry Lane.

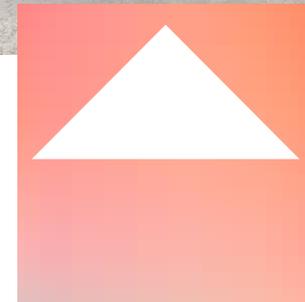


The name of the car park we started in links to Bridport's best known industry – the manufacture of rope and nets using locally-grown flax and hemp. Rope walks were the alleyways or distinctive long buildings where rope was stretched out to dry.

You will see several of these long buildings in this early part of our walk - as in this picture.



Go along Foundry Lane to a small bridge over a river.

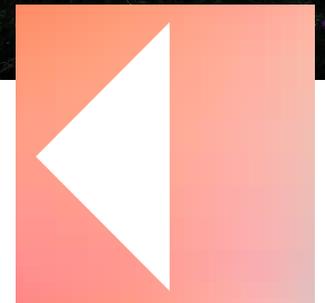


Look back to your right to see St Michael's net factory, including an ornamental tower, shown in this photo. The factory, built around 120 years ago, belonged to William Edwards & Son. The local rope and net industry began in the Middle Ages and continues today, with some of the nets used at the Wimbledon tennis tournament.

The river you have just crossed is the Brit. This river and a tributary, the Asker, helped to shape Bridport, which grew up in Saxon times on a little peninsula of higher and drier ground between them.



Follow the path as it bends left and turn left before the allotments. Follow the path into St Mary's Playing Fields and stop when you have passed the play equipment.



St Mary's Playing Fields are low-lying and flood-prone so modern residential areas like Skilling across to your right were built on higher ground – just like our ancestors would have done.

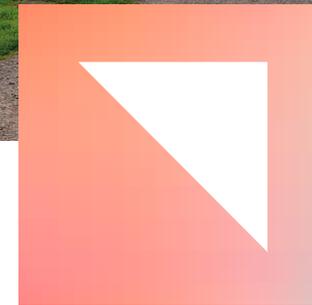
Further along, and beyond the river, you can see Bridport's parish church – St Mary's. This church was built in Saxon times and would have been the centrepiece of the town. From this viewpoint you can appreciate how, since modern expansion, the church now sits on the outskirts of the town's centre.



Before heading on, spend 5 mindful minutes listening to the wildlife.



Continue through the park then go left over St Mary's Bridge. Take the path right, pictured, and continue as it becomes South Walk Road until you reach South Street.



The corner building to your right is The Chantry, built around the 14th or 15th century. It is one of the oldest domestic buildings in Dorset, and probably the oldest in Bridport. A chantry was the home provided for a priest in the will of a wealthy local who was also paid to pray in a nearby church for the soul of that person.

However, the height of the building suggests another function before that. It is at the southern end of the original town, and in the Middle Ages vessels were able to sail up the Brit almost to the town. So, The Chantry might have been a customs house or even a lighthouse.



Go left spotting the features on the next page en route to St Mary's Church.



The older properties on South Street are built on the street frontage. A couple of hundred years ago, front gardens became fashionable, and you can see a couple of examples on the left side. Can you spot a blocked archway into one of these gardens?

Just before the church, look across the road to see the Meeting House of the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. This building and some adjacent almshouses were given to the Quakers in 1697. A few decades before this, Quakers had shocked many in the Church of England by their rejection of organised religion. The resulting persecution of Quakers was only banned about 10 years before the properties were donated, and we suspect some locals were still shocked by a Meeting House so close to the church.



Look at how the trees in this photo taken around 100 years ago differ from today.



Go through the churchyard and enter St Mary's Church.



Though there has been a church on this site since Saxon times, much of it was rebuilt around 1860 during a major restoration by the architect John Hicks – the young Thomas Hardy was an apprentice to Hicks at the time.

Ahead of you, and a little to the right, you will find the 13th century tomb of a knight. It has been suggested that he was John Gervase, whose family owned land at Chideock.



Take your time to explore the church.



Exit the church and return to South Street. Turn left to follow the path towards the town's centre, taking a moment to turn back and compare this photo to today's view. En route, cross the road to reach Buckydoo Square.

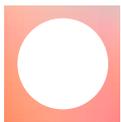


In front of you is the Town Hall, built in 1786. The person in charge of the construction was James Hamilton, who later designed the Osmington White Horse and the stone base of the King's Statue in Weymouth.

Nowadays, the area in front of the Town Hall is called Buckydoo Square, although until recently 'Buckydoo' was only the name of the nearby alleyway. The origin of the name 'Buckydoo' has been the source of much debate and entertainment for local historians – maybe the best idea is that it comes from 'bocardo', an old name for a prison (there was a lock-up here several hundred years ago).



The old photo shows a structure in the Square. Perhaps it was part of a market – what do you think?



Turn around to look back down South Street.

This photo, like the previous one, shows a lack of traffic. This may have been arranged specially by the photographer, who has also persuaded people to pose at intervals along the street, some probably outside their own shops.

Halfway down on the left side, you can see Bridport Museum, housed in a 500 year-old building called The Castle, where you can learn more about the local rope and netmaking industries, and other interesting features of Bridport's history.



Use the crossing next to the Town Hall then go back down South Street. Take the lane (the Tanyard) on the right through a stone archway. After a short distance, turn left and go through another archway to enter Borough Gardens, a lovely tucked away walled garden which is well worth a visit! When ready to leave, return to the lane and continue to the end. Turn right and the car park opens on your left.



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



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
ABBOTSBURY
BEAMINSTER
SHAFTESBURY
STURMINSTER NEWTON
WAREHAM

Further Information

www.stepin2nature.org