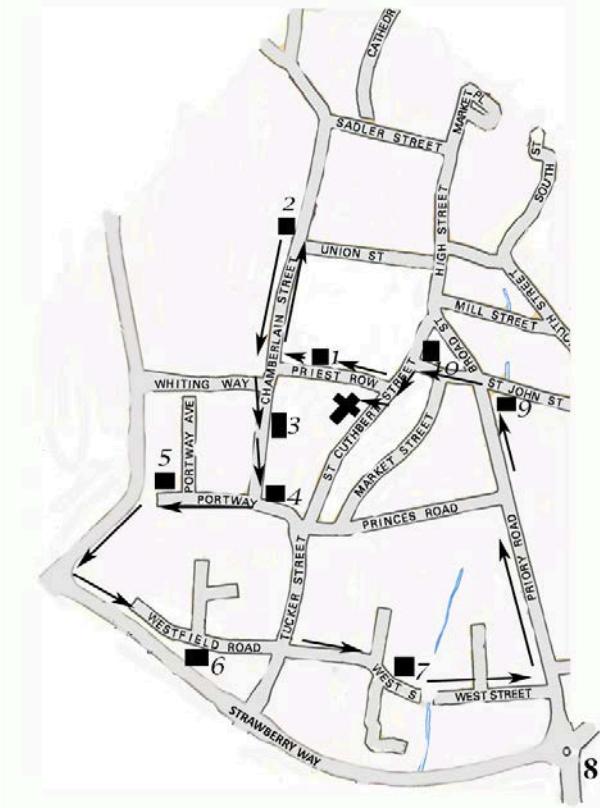


Map of Wells

The route of the St Cuthbert's parish Trail



Start at St Cuthbert's Church, in the centre of the map, and follow the arrowed line linking the numbers which show the key sites.

Key to trail

Start at St Cuthbert's church

1. Priest Row: Llewelyn Almshouses, Globe
2. Chamberlain St: 1713 Harper Trust
3. Almshouses (used as Town Hall till 1777)
4. Little Theatre (site of Charity Sch for Boys)
5. Adult Centre (ex-Charity Sch for Girls)
6. Station yard and S&D Strawberry Line
7. West St: Mill stream (site of lower Mill)
8. To R: site of United Dairies/Cow&Gate
To L: past Thorn EMI Social Club
9. St John's Priory (site of Central Sch) and Bridge with mill stream
10. City Arms – the old Jail

End at St Cuthbert's Church

Prepared and Designed by Wells and Mendip Museum and Tourist Information Office

2017

St Cuthbert's Wells:

A Parish Trail

Approx 1.5 miles

45 mins



Introduction to the Parish of St Cuthbert's in the City of Wells

The smallest city in England, Wells has a 'big' history. An ancient spring shows evidence of a Roman shrine well before a C8th church, and the current 1175 Cathedral. At the other end of the 'town', St Cuthbert's Church has Saxon origins, also. It mostly dates from C13th, with a C15th 122 foot tall tower. St Cuthbert's is the civic church of Wells. Several annual events involving the Mayor and Corporation in full regalia still take place here. Medieval Wells became rich as a wool town and market centre: two weekly markets are still held. Businesses often had an agricultural bias – mills, dairying, animal feed, brushes (originally linked to hygiene for dairy needs). The C20th saw electronics as a major industry, but these too have gone. Tourism is now a main business, so WELCOME!

Start at St Cuthbert's Church

1. Priests' Row is so named because several priests lived here – each in charge of one of approximately 14 altars or shrines within the church. On the right, No10 is still Priest's Cottage next to Llewellyn Almshouses (1636) for '*the deserving poor*' – with a strict regime of uniforms and church attendance managed by Churchwardens. Opposite, No13, revealed in corner plaster, lived Rich Nicholls mason and wife Sarah dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco, snuff. The Globe has been at the corner since 1838 – a skittle alley was upstairs.



The Globe

Turn right to go 100 yards up this street.

2. Harper Trust House, No 28 Chamberlain St, a street with small private schools, and where C18th professional men (lawyers, surgeons) and minor gentry lived. Mr Archibald Harper, Mayor in 1702, left a house and £500 in Trust - in his 1713 will - for '*5 poor old decayed wooll-combers*'. Already the wool trade was declining in Wells: a need had emerged which Harper's Trust aimed to meet. Until the millennium it was used to house those in need. Now it is a private commercial let.



Turn around and return down Chamberlain St till reaching more Almshouses, on your left.

3. Bubwith Almshouses (Beggar Street)



These were founded by Bishop Bubwith in his 1424 will and added to by Bishops Still (1607) and Willis (1777), Walter Bricke (1636) and others. The chapel at the east end was once used by Barkham's Charity School, and the centre for accommodation. The large Hall at the west end was used for Council meetings till 1779 when a new Town Hall was built on Market Square. The old Hall then became a two-storey block for more of the '*old and infirm*'. The Almshouses now have 32 units including some for couples.

Continue down the road till, on the left corner, you see:

4. Little Theatre - site of Boys' School



This was the site of an elegant home known as Soho House – 'soho' was rumoured to be the password of supporters of the Duke of Monmouth, finally defeated at the battle of Sedgemoore 1685 not far from Wells.

Founded by Ezeckiel Barkham in 1641, his Charity School merged with another similar school of 1715 and became known as the Blue School – blue being commonly used as the colour of the cloaks provided for the charity children. From 1828 Soho House was used by the Headmasters, with an adjacent school hall for boys, and girls housed in converted cottages in front (now demolished). Soho House was replaced in 1911 with the current buildings. Since 1964, the school – now vastly enlarged – joined secondary modern and central schools on a much bigger site on Kennion Rd, to the north.

The remaining buildings were transformed for the Byre Theatre, so named as it started, in the 1950s, in farm buildings nearby. It then housed the Wells Operatic Society, before becoming The Little Theatre.

On the corner is Wells' first pre-war example of a reinforced concrete built structure. Once the school dining/sports hall, it is now used for community activities.

5. Portway Rd Girls' School building

Opposite the Boys' School is a small concrete building, built for commercial purposes in 1950s on the site of Brine's Brush factory – one of several that were once in Wells.

Further along this road is an interesting centre, built in 1900 to which the girls from the Blue School moved from previous cramped quarters.

Since moving to Kennion Rd the building has become a teaching resource and now the



Somerset Skills and Learning Centre.

Now turn left and walk beside a busy Portway Rd up towards the traffic lights at the brow of a slope. On the left is a grassy area with a tarmac path leading down towards a bushy alleyway taking you to Westfield Rd, past private garages and an area of new housing.

6. Station Yard

Wells used to have three different railway companies arriving at their own separate stations: S&D - Somerset and Dorset or, the Slow and Dirty 1859, East Somerset Railway 1862, Cheddar branch of the Bristol and Exeter line 1870 – the latter two merged into the Great Western Railway. Now, we have none - thanks to Dr Beeching's 'axe' in the 1960s. On the right, is a large, sturdy stone building, which was once part of a proud and busy Cheddar line station yard complex. This line took fresh strawberries from Cheddar to the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Club – hence the road's name, Strawberry Way!



Station yard

At the bottom of the road, cross over into West Street, past the GPO sorting office, into a semi-pedestrian paved area and find Wells Trading Post on your left – full of delights and unexpected finds from the past.

7. West Street: mill stream

Passing in front of this (if you can resist the temptations within) you will hear a rushing mill stream. Look through the long glass window to see the old mill wheel. The mill stream (originating from the Bishop's moat) flows on past Lidl, towards another mill at Keward, a few miles downstream.

This mill began by grinding corn, next briefly turned to silk in the 1820s, then it was adapted to produce animal feed and fertiliser, before finally transforming into an antique shop.



West Street Mill

Continue along West Street till reaching another busy highway, Priory Rd.

8. Industrial /manufacturing sites

At the beginning of the C19th had you looked into the distance on the right, beyond the roundabout, you would have seen a nationally important dairy centre – first, United Dairy Co, then Cow and Gate, which became Nutrica in the 1980s. Later the site was developed for housing.

On the roundabout, Tinknells still provides a link to the agricultural businesses of the past, for which Wells was well-known.

This is also the starting point for one of Somerset's famous Carnivals, in November, which is a finale for the Autumn season of Wells' Festivals: Food, Music, and Literature.



Cow & Gate's Wells factory
produces over 50 varieties
of high quality, nutritionally
complete baby meals in jars.

The factory also supplies ready
made baby milk products for use
in maternity hospitals – just part
of the comprehensive babyfood
range produced by Cow & Gate
to supply most of a baby's needs
for its vital first year.

Leave the past behind, turn left, along Priory Rd.

You soon come to another reminder of Wells' more recent industrial past – that of high level electronics in the form of Thorn-EMI. This business lasted till the millennium. The firm's ex-social centre has now transformed as a Nursery!

On reaching the corner with the 1930s old Regal cinema building, cross straight over continuing on Priory Rd. On the right you will soon see ecclesiastical-looking buildings built for the Central School in 1858, on the site of St John's Priory.

At the next cross roads, immediately around the corner, on the right, you will find St John's Priory House

9. St John's Priory



Founded in 1210 as a hospital for poor men, it became a Priory in 1350 with a guest house. St John's Priory was conveniently situated - whether for pilgrims or peddlers - as they entered Wells. The Priory attracted many benefactors and much land through bequests to fund its work. The Priory house dating from 1313 provided accommodation for the prior, chaplain and 10 brothers. This house, much altered, still stands, while the other buildings fell into ruin or were demolished over the subsequent years.

During the C16th dissolution of monasteries and priories, many of St John's lands were given to the Tudor monarchs' favourites - such as Sir Christopher Hatton, Elizabeth I's dancing master!

Other lands were bought by private citizens, passing into the hands of eminent families.

St John's Bridge and Mill Stream

Opposite Priory House, a hole in the wall allows a view of the mill stream which flows to the Mill in West St (No. 7).

Return to the St John's St/Priory Rd junction, cross over into Queen St, and walk to the corner where you will find a pink-wash building – The City Arms.

10. City Arms (Jail) - once, a den of iniquity! As the name suggests, this was once used as the town lock-up - a holding place while the detained waited to be brought before a magistrate. It was not a prison - that role was taken by Shepton Mallet, a town 8 miles to the east. By 1779, after the building of the new Town Hall on Market Square, the 'holding cells' were transferred to rooms beneath the new building. This meant that prisoners could be led straight to the court room above. The City Arms - which had been allowed to sell ale to the prisoners - now became a 'regular' inn, but its links to crime continued! Petty Session documents show countless 'misdemeanours' here: selling drink outside hours, obscene language, assault, young women pick-pocketing and worse...



And back to St Cuthbert's Church



The City Memorial

St Cuthbert's Church

Inside the church, the two front pews are for the Corporation - complete with a holder for the ceremonial staff, and the arms of the city (tree and three wells) carved on the pew end.



Mid-way along the north aisle is the locked door of the Treasury and Armoury. This is where the 'church plate' was stored and, since Elizabethan times, weapons and gunpowder for defending the city - whether against threats from the Spanish, French or during the Civil War.

Next to the Armoury is the Holy Trinity Chapel. This was where the city fire-engine was kept. There is mention of it being taken out for urgent use in the middle of divine service!

During the Cromwellian period in the mid-C17th the adjacent Church Rooms were used to house some Cathedral books and made available for borrowing by citizens of Wells - exactly which is unclear (just those eligible to vote, who owned property, or....). The books (most of them) were returned at the Restoration of Charles II.

Other civic responsibilities included the distribution of charity - sometimes money or bread - to the 'second poor' i.e. *not* those already on Parish Relief, but the next 'level of struggling people who were still part of the 'deserving poor'. Churchwardens' accounts include giving money to help a family, in 1848, wanting to emigrate to the American Colonies (cheaper/better than keeping them in the workhouse), also granting of clothes, bedding, even a cow to support families when in distress.

A long tradition of civic involvement and local philanthropy continues...