THE GLASTONBURY MILLENNIUM TRAIL

Welcome to Glastonbury. We hope that you enjoy your visit. This circular walking trail will help you explore our town and learn about its fascinating history.

HOW TO FOLLOW THE TRAIL:

- Start and finish here, going round the town in a clockwise direction. The trail will take you about 1 hour.
- The route is marked by 20 numbered Direction Markers set in the pavement. The Pavement Markers point you to another seven Boards which tell you about nearby interesting sites.
- Optional detours (in italics) to other places of interest are marked D> on the pavement Direction Markers.

This is Information Board A

1 You are standing outside the Georgian Town Hall.
The arches on the ground floor were originally open for the market stalls. It was built in 1818 after the larger Market House that had almost filled the wide road in front of it since the mid 1600s was pulled down. This had a much larger market area, a jail and a Court Room above. The Court was used as a school, the Town Hall and, for a while, as a silk factory.

Glastonbury Abbey was the largest landowner in Somerset with one of Europe's major church buildings until it was demolished soon after 1537. To the left of the Town Hall is one of its medieval gateways and the Porter's Lodge. The painting on the stone over the small arch shows that 100 years ago the Lodge and the blocked-up gateway were used as the Red Lion Inn.

Cross the road towards the Market Cross.

2 OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Go down Benedict Street to St Benedict's Church. It was rebuilt about 1500 and then extended 125 years ago. Past the church on the right is the first barracks block built for the Somerset Constabulary. The original County Headquarters was in Magdalene Street.

OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Go along the pedestrian Northload Street to see more late medieval buildings. On the shop to the right of the entrance to Northload Street is a carving showing a couple of about 1470. Perhaps this is close to the place where the medieval betrothal ceremonies were conducted—before going to the church porch.

Information Board B is at the left side of the Crown Hotel behind the Cross (Pavement Marker 3)
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This is Information Board B

3 You are standing beside one of the old Glastonbury Inns, the Crown, mentioned in 1535. After a bad fire 100 years ago little remains of the medieval original.

The Market Place forms the focus of the town’s life. Many buildings around it date from abbey times, even though their fronts have been ‘modernised’ during the centuries. Look at their ceiling beams and fire-places.

The present cross was built in 1845 by Benjamin Ferrey. It replaced a medieval water conduit and a cross with its surrounding Jacobean octagonal market shelter. The view below was painted 200 years ago, from where you now stand, looking up Magdalene Street. It shows the jail end of the 17th century Market House.

4 The George (& Pilgrims) Inn was built by Abbot Selwood about 1465 for visitors to the town and is one of the finest surviving medieval inns in the country.

Through the courtyard across the road is the ‘Bridget Chapel’ within the remains of a medieval house built on the site of the Norman market area.

5 The Tourist Information Office (up the High Street on the left) is in The Tribunal. This 600 year old merchant’s house had a later front built onto it, salvaged from other buildings some 500 years ago. It houses some of the finest objects dug up from the famous Iron Age Glastonbury Lake Village. This was occupied 2,200 years ago a mile north of the town.

Through the archway opposite the Tribunal is the Assembly Rooms, built in 1864 on the stables of the former White Hart Inn. The sign of this 1650s inn was used to hang some of the rebels who supported the Duke of Monmouth in 1685. The Inn was rebuilt in 1760 and became the largest Glastonbury Coaching Inn until the railway came 100 years later.

6 ‘The Monarch’ was another Georgian Inn with a date of 1713. Its side entry leads to St John’s Square. The churchyard off High Street, opposite, is from the Somerset & Dorset Railway Company’s Glastonbury station.

Information Board C is at the entrance to Church Lane
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This is Information Board C

7 St John’s Church tower was built in the late 1400s and is 134½ feet high (45 metres)—look for the bagpiper near the top. The Glastonbury Thorn in the churchyard flowers at Christmas and Easter. Blossom from this tree decorates the Christmas breakfast table of our Monarch each year. Inside the Church are features or furnishings from most of the past ten centuries.

On the corner of Hanover Square, across the High Street, is the Vestry Hall, built in 1865. It replaced the medieval Church House (see the drawing) which was used as a Guildhall, a brew-house for Church Ales and the townspeople’s meeting place. The blocked ground floor opening at the front was provided to house the town’s horse-drawn fire engine until the Fire Station was built in 1901. Beyond the Vestry Hall is a small gate on the site of an early abbey gateway. Its gives a view of the abbey precinct. This land was farmed for 300 years until it was turned into parkland for the Abbey House in 1825.

The War Memorial in front of the Church was designed by Bligh Bond. He used the design of a Saxon Cross that he discovered when excavating in the abbey. His work in the ruins started soon after the abbey was bought for the Church in 1908. He was sacked by the Church authorities after revealing that some of his research was based upon the Spirit writing of a medieval monk.

8 Further up the High Street, past the Church is St George’s Hall, built in the 1720s. Its ornate staircase was sold to the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1920s. Next to it is another early Georgian lawyer’s house. Most of the High Street looked like this 200 years ago—long before plate glass shop windows were introduced. Archers Way leads to the butts area where local medieval bowmen trained. Further on is the 1930s ‘Tudor’ Post Office.

9 For 250 years Becketts Inn was the home and office of many Glastonbury surgeons. There is another fine Georgian house next door. Across the road and higher up the High Street is the United Reformed Church, re-built in 1814 with a 1898 portico. This is on the site of the Ship Inn, where Glastonbury’s dissenters settled after leaving the parish church when Charles II was restored to the throne. The adjacent large houses replaced the town’s largest medieval town house in the 1830s.

Information Board D is by the Health Centre at the top of the High Street (Pavement Marker 10)
This is Information Board D

10 The Health Centre, built on the site of the Glastonbury Arms, won a Civic Trust award in 1978

OPTIONAL DETOUR D

Go up Bove Town for 200 metres to Jacoby Cottage on the left. It still shows traces of its origin as a medieval Pilgrimage Chapel.

By 1791 it was the meeting place of the early Methodists.
Until that time Bove Town was the main medieval road to Wells. Many of its houses have internal features that are up to 500 years old. The thatched cottage near the top is dated 1637.

Continue right through Wick Hollow to a route to Tor Hill. By turning right along Balwarks Lane, you can join the path down Bushy Coombe. This leads to Dods Lane which re-joins this Trail between E and F at 12.

From the top of the High Street turn right and continue along Lambrock Street. The Methodist Chapel opposite the top of the High Street was built in 1861. In front of it is a Victorian water fountain with a small reservoir behind it. This was built when the Victorian Borough authorities were compelled to replace the town’s inadequate water supply. Parts of it had been installed up to 400 years earlier.

In Lambrock Street the Victorian terrace houses on the left show some of the products of the high quality eighteenth and nineteenth century Glastonbury Brick and Pottery kilns. One house has Art Nouveau door and window details. These houses were built upon a field that was the traditional site of the abbey bell foundry.

11 Further along is Launder Close. The Regency house on the right of Launder Close shows subsidence caused by its position over the stream that comes down Bushy Coombe. This supply of lots of water may be the reason for this being the traditional site of the abbey laundry.

Information Board E is on the Old Vicarage wall opposite Silver Street (Pavement Marker 11)
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This is Information Board E

11 Behind the high wall is the Old Vicarage, built for £900 in 1819 with help from Queen Anne’s Bounty. This fund was used because the Glastonbury Vicars had a very low income—after the Abbey had appropriated their endowment. Across the road is the pretty 18th century Georgian house, Kylmere. Along-side it is the first purpose built Methodist Chapel in Glastonbury.

Silver Street was originally inside the abbey precinct. The original northern wall surrounding the abbey was nearer to the High Street. However, the high wall along Chilkwell Street follows the original eastern boundary of the precinct. It may be that the bottom stones are from the time of the re-building of the abbey after the disastrous fire of 1184—or even that of the earlier Norman church. Opposite the wall, on the site of a row of medieval cottages, are more spacious Georgian and Victorian houses.

12 OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Go up Dod Lane via Bushy Coombe to a public footpath to Glastonbury Tor (158 metres high) with its spectacular views across the Somerset levels.

Off Dod Lane is one of the grandest Glastonbury houses—Chalice Hill House, built about 1830 by Richard Periam Prat. Prat was Town Clerk, practically running Glastonbury, and was a key instigator of the Glastonbury Canal. This opened to Hightbridge in 1833. By 1840 it was clear that the canal was a financial disaster and Prat and his brother absconded with some of the Borough’s money, eventually settling in Canada. Further along Chilkwell Street, on the edge of the house’s original extensive grounds, is Prat’s lawyer’s office. It still houses the drainage authority and the business started by Stephen Holman, who stepped into Prat’s shoes. The canal was bought and closed by the Somerset Central Railway Co.

The archway in the wall opposite Dod Lane was made in 1825 to give access to Abbey House. This was designed in the Tudor style by John Buckler, the well known antiquarian illustrator. It was built for Fry Reeves, the town’s prominent banker. He bought most of the abbey precinct farmland and turned it into “parkland with interesting ruins”. The carvings were salvaged from the lodgings built by Abbot Bere and used soon after by Henry VII.

Further along Chilkwell Street are more Georgian and Regency houses. Blenheim House was built for Periam Prat in the early 1800s.

Information Board F is opposite the end of the abbey precinct wall (Pavement Marker 13)
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This is Information Board F

13 Richmond Villas, facing down Bere Lane, are from the Victorian era. Look for the early post box set in the wall. From 1750 to 1830 turnpike gates here barred free access into the town via both Chilkwell Street and Bere Lane.

OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Go further along Chilkwell Street past cottages, many of which are medieval. 300 metres along on the left is a turn to Chalice Well Gardens. The well ‘shaft’ and its cover is a later opening through the roof of a 12th century well house. This was built to protect a fast flowing spring that was piped from here into the abbey precinct. After the abbey was closed it was almost buried as the coombe silted up. Medieval and later legends link this site to the burial of the grail or of a chalice brought here by Joseph of Arimathea. In 1752 Chalice Well water was claimed to have healing properties and for a short period many thousands came here. Wellhouse Lane, beyond the Chalice Well gardens, provides another route to the Tor Hill.

Cross the road to the grass area where the turnpike gatekeeper’s house stood. Turn right into Bere Lane.

14 Set in the wall opposite is a watering place that gave access to water diverted to the Abbey from the Chalice Well spring. The Somerset Rural Life Museum is housed in the ornate barn built about 1340 to store some of the produce of the abbey estates. The farm buildings and the house were mostly added in Victorian times. Until recently meadows came up to the barn from the River Brue, so the 1790 cottages on the right of Bere Lane were called ‘Prospect Buildings’. The southern wall of the abbey precinct boundary is incorporated in the rear wall of some of these houses.

15 The new houses opposite are on the site of the earlier farm that worked the land called Actis, from here down to the River Brue. The Old Butleigh Road was the turnpike road across the moors and gives a view of the memorial on the Polden Hills to Admiral Hood of Butleigh.

16 The new Butleigh Road opposite was made in the early 1800s. It led to the discovery of a number of burials. These were possibly suicides which were traditionally buried in unconsecrated ground by cross-roads outside towns.

Information Board G is in the Fisher’s Hill play area (Pavement Marker 17)
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This is Information Board G

17 The large chestnut trees are on the site of a former farm. The land it farmed was the precinct of the derelict abbey. Beyond the Play Area was the home of the Glastonbury Football Club. From here is one of the finest views of the full extent of the ruins of the abbey church—the longest in northern Europe when it was destroyed. Also here is a view to the Tor Hill which is not visible from the abbey, being hidden behind Chalice Hill.

Across the road are houses built from the local blue lias stone. One was the town’s first nursing home. It was built to celebrate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Cross over and re-trace your steps up the hill, turning right into Hill Head. This leads to Wirral Hill. Here are extensive views of Glastonbury and across the surrounding levels to the Polden, Mendip and the Quantock Hills. This was the main turnpike road to Bridgwater and the southwest until 1820. In the 19th century the housing at the bottom of the hill had a red light reputation. The land to the left of the hillside is still called Vineyards, after its medieval use. The land to the right of the road, to the far end of the hill, was one of the abbey’s three local deer parks. At the side of this road, half way along the hillside in Roman Way, was the site of the first recorded Glastonbury Thorn.

This was the legendary place where Joseph of Arimathea landed and planted his staff, from which the Glastonbury Thorn sprouted.

18 Go straight down the hill towards the Market Place. On the right of Magdalene Street is the site of the Chaingate that secured the town from the south. Next to it is the Abbey Grange, set back and with an overflow of water from the abbey precinct emerging from its wall. This was the house (since altered) that was built in 1713 out of the materials of the abbot’s lodgings which was then being demolished. The medieval carvings, later used on the Abbey House and its gateway, were originally built into this house.

Information Board H is by the entrance to the Almshouses (Pavement Marker 19)
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This is Information Board H

19 On your left is St Margaret’s Chapel and Almshouses. This medieval hospital was moved here from St John’s churchyard 700 years ago. There were two rows of almshouses for twelve men built along each side of the original hall—one row was demolished in the 1960s. Continue along Magdalene Street towards the Town Hall. First is the Pump House. This was hurriedly built out of some outbuildings in 1752 when the healing properties of the Chalice Well water were discovered and tens of thousands of visitors came to the town.

In the late 1800s the Copper Beech next door was the home of J G L Bulleid. He was the most eminent of the town’s Victorians. His father had been fellow churchwarden with Periam Prat when the canal failed. He was so disturbed by the events that he threw himself from St John’s Church tower. It was J G L Bulleid’s son Arthur who discovered the Lake Village.

St Mary’s Church was built in 1939 and houses the restored shrine of Our Lady of Glastonbury. Around her image is a large tapestry showing some of the saints of Glastonbury. Next to the Church was the Convent of St Louis for most of the 20th century. Beyond it and set back from the road is Somerset House. This was built as the Somerset County Constabulary headquarters at a time when Glastonbury was near to the geographical centre of Somerset.

Through the railings across the road is a view of the kitchen built to serve the abbey’s palace. This is one of the few buildings to survive the dissolution of the abbey—but it has since lost four corner chimneys. One of the many uses of the kitchen was to house the Glastonbury Quakers. Beyond the car park are the remains of St Mary’s Chapel. It was the first building to be re-erected after a disastrous fire in 1184 that destroyed the abbey that was venerated as the earliest in the land and the burial place of the first kings of all England. The entrance to the Glastonbury Abbey ruins is next to the Town Hall.

20 OPTIONAL DETOUR D> Turn left and go through the archway to the Austin Almshouses. They were built in 1887 by Stanley Austin, the then owner of the Abbey House and the ruins. He had emigrated to Australia and then returned a wealthy man. Past the almshouses and to the right is a route to St Benedict’s Church. In the town’s earliest medieval house deeds this is called ‘Gropecuntlen’—an area of doubtful morality in early Glastonbury.

Return to Information Board A by the Town Hall (Pavement Marker 1) where the Abbey entrance is.