

1. The trail starts outside the Town Hall in the Market Place. This graceful building houses the City Council. On the first floor is an elegant ballroom with a display of civic and episcopal portraits. The Town Hall was built in 1779 on the site of a canonical house sometimes occupied by an archdeacon. The front garden of this house became the Market Place. The bishop's rights to the market tolls were acquired by the Corporation at the same time. The Exchequer, also called the Assize Hall, is shown on early maps of Wells as standing in the present Market Place. It was built in 1542 as one of several public chambers in the town. The Exchequer was built on pillars which were screened and curtained for use as an Assize Court. The upper floor was divided into two chambers: one a council chamber, the other a wool store. This building was demolished in the 18th century when it was in poor repair and replaced in 1836 by a colonnaded Market House on the east side of the Market Place. The colonnaded front of the Market Place was later filled in when the building lost its original function. It became the Fire Station and subsequently the Post Office. The row of buildings on the north side of the Market Place was built in 1451 by Bishop Bekynton. Known as the New Works, these houses backed onto the churchyard against the 13th century wall separating the Liberty from the town. Water from St Andrew's Well flows through the cellars of these houses. On the pavement in front of the shops is a memorial to the Olympic Gold Medal winning jump of local athlete Mary Bignal Rand at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.

Penniless Porch, adjoining the New Works, is also the work of Bishop Bekynton, whose rebus (personal symbols) can be found on the north side. It is one of the two openings into the Liberty from the Market Place.

The Bishop's Eye is the imposing gateway leading towards the Bishop's Palace. Together with the buildings on either side, it is also the work of Bishop Bekynton.

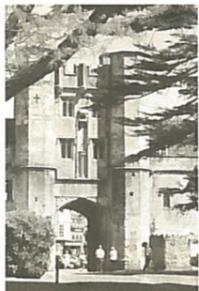
Walk through the Bishop's Eye and before you lies the moated enclosure containing the Bishop's Palace.

The moat, high defensive walls and gatehouse with drawbridge and portcullis were built by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury in the 14th century and were a symbol of his episcopal authority over the city, reflecting the serious state of tension between bishop and the city. The citizens found the strong control and high tolls and taxes extracted by the bishop deeply irksome throughout the Middle Ages.



The drawbridge cannot now be raised. It was last drawn up in 1831 during a time of anxiety over the Reform Bill, when riots broke out in Bristol and the Bishop's Palace there was burnt down.

On the left of the gatehouse you will notice a small bell with a rope attached to the wall of the gatehouse. In the 19th century a bishop's daughter taught a swan to ring this bell for food. To this day the swans of the moat have continued this charming tradition.



Cross the drawbridge and enter the Bishop's Palace.

The residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells is probably the most perfect and complete surviving example of a medieval Bishop's Palace. Climb the steps to the top of the Prison Bastion with fantastic views of the moat, Palace Green, Bishop's Eye and Cathedral. The Palace café, The Bishop's Table, is named after Bishop Ken's tradition of inviting twelve poor men and women of Wells to share a meal at

his table when in residence at the Palace. Bishop Ken was Bishop here between 1685-1691 and the original table can still be seen in the Palace's vaulted Entrance Hall. The Bishop's Palace and its 14 acres of RHS partner gardens are open to the public, January to December. The gardens are home to the 3 well pools that give the City its name.



2. Follow the footpath which runs beside the moat. The recreation ground that lies on your right was given to the people of Wells in celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee of 1887. Bishop Hervey had a romantic and enthusiastic view of the venture. "Summer evenings passed in the beautiful open air, with the amusement of looking on at the cricket, and perhaps with a band of music occasionally, would promote an innocent cheerfulness of spirit which

is almost a step towards godliness." The necessary funds were raised by public subscription, with the mayor and the bishop each making especially large contributions. The grand opening in 1888 was a special day of sports and amusements, with many speeches and a concert in the evening.

Standing on the edge of the recreation ground is the magnificent 15th Century Bishop's Barn. Before the recreation ground was created, the barn stood in an area called the Conygre, together with two cottages, gardens and yard.

The medieval word 'conygre' means rabbit warren (coney meaning rabbit and garth meaning enclosure), evidence that here, on the edge of the Bishop's Park, there was a rabbit warren.

The Bishop's Park, which extends from the eastern end of the moat across the fields towards Dulcote, was a deer park, created by Bishop Jocelyn in the early 13th century. The main roads to both Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury had to be re-routed around the park, and a minor road to Wellesley was closed.

3. Walk around the moat until you can see in the distance the Bishop's Palace gardens, where water rushes over a waterfall.

A little way beyond the waterfall are the 3 well pools that give the City its name. Water falls on the Mendip Hills, travels underground, and emerges in the gardens, bubbling up as springs. Bishop Bekynton devised an intricate system for exploiting the four million gallons of water which daily gush from these springs.

In 1541 a well house was built in the gardens, which you can still see today, and lead pipes were laid to carry the water into the Market Place and the Palace. To the mayor and burgesses of the city, and their successors forever, the Bishop granted a system of water conduits "so that the water may flow as far as the high cross in the city market and other places". Bekynton requested that the mayor and burgesses should visit his tomb in the Cathedral every year to pray for his soul. In 1925 a local commentator noted that the citizens of Wells had not been keeping their side of the bargain, but the tradition has been revived, and prayers are now offered at evensong on a Sunday in January every year.

4. Walk back along the moat, through the Bishop's Eye, turn right and then right again through Penniless Porch. Walk on to Cathedral Green to view the magnificent West Front of the Cathedral.

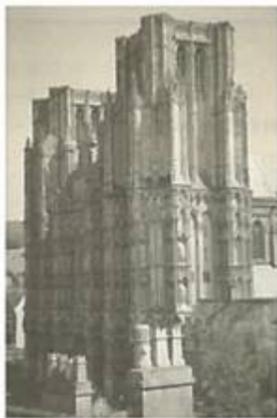
The Cathedral that you see before you was started about the year 1180 by Bishop Reginald de Bohun. The church was consecrated in 1239, but it had not reached its completion by that date. The statuary on the West



Front was added c1240-1260. Construction work was still in progress when the Black Death struck in 1348. By 1508 the buildings of the Cathedral and cloisters were complete.

Wells Cathedral is a building of great beauty and historic interest. You are therefore urged to buy a guidebook or to take a guided tour of the Cathedral. You will notice a road running along the north side of Cathedral Green. At the west end of Cathedral Green it passes through another of the fine medieval gateways, the 15th century Brown's Gate, also built by Bishop Bekynton and sometimes called the Dean's Eye. Richard Brown was the tenant of an adjoining property in 1553.

5. Walk across the Green to Brown's Gate, then follow the road back along the north side of the Cathedral. Note the exceptional range of buildings along this road.



The large medieval house, with its arched gatehouse and courtyard, is the Old Deanery. It is a mainly 15th century building, but the parts facing the Cathedral Green were altered in the 17th and 18th centuries. This imposing building reflects the importance of the Dean, whose job was, as it still is, to oversee the management of the Cathedral and to preside over the Chapter. Henry VII was entertained here by Dean Gunthorpe in 1497. These buildings now house the offices of the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the present Dean living elsewhere in St Andrew's Liberty.

The next building, once the house of the Chancellor, is now the Wells and Mendip Museum, which houses important collections of finds from the hills of Mendip, including the Witch of Wookey Hole and the story of how the Mendip Hills were formed. There is also a fine collection of 18th and 19th century samplers, a display of some of the 13th century statues from the West Front of the Cathedral, arranged so that the skillful work of the masons can be viewed from very close range, and archaeological finds ranging from the 11th to the 19th century, from excavations in the museum garden. In 2011 the Museum also took possession of the archives of the City of

Wells and fascinating items from the archive are frequently on display.

The Museum also houses the Visitor Information Service and helpful staff and volunteers will be ready to help with your questions.



The Old Archdeaconry stands next to the Museum. The last archdeacon to use the building was the Italian Polydore Vergil in the 16th century. The façade of the building was largely reconstructed in the 19th century, but inside is a wonderful arch-braced oak roof built for Archdeacon Holes between 1450 and 1470. The building was used as Wells Theological College from 1890 to 1971 and is now the music school of Wells Cathedral School.

6. Walk on a little way under the archway over the road, and turn left into Vicars' Close

Vicars' Close was built by 1363, the work of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury. It accommodated the Vicars Choral, the men of the choir. Previously they had lived in lodgings in the town, which sometimes caused problems of lateness and unruly behavior. In an attempt to regularise the Vicars, this close containing 42 bachelor dwellings was built. Each house contained one room downstairs, and another upstairs, linked by a rear stair turret. After the Reformation the number of Vicars was reduced and some of the houses were thrown together into larger units. Originally there were no separate front gardens, the houses looking out upon an elongated quadrangle. This quadrangle seems to predate those of

Oxford and Cambridge and may have served as a model for the college arrangements of these earliest universities. Today the Vicars Choral and other members of the Cathedral foundation live in Vicars' Close.

Walk up the Vicars' Close to look at the Vicars' Chapel and Library at the top of the road. If the Chapel is unlocked, you may quietly enter to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere.



The Vicars' Chapel and Library, together with the individual front gardens and gates, were put in in the early 1400's. The chimneys of the houses were improved in the 1470's. The houses bear the coat of arms of Bekynton, and the rebuses of his executors, Talbot, Swan and Sugar.

Walk back down Vicars' Close.

The Chain Bridge at the south end of the Close provided the Vicars with a way into the Cathedral which kept them apart from worldly temptations. The first building in the Close was the communal dining hall, completed with a 'temporary' roof at the time of the Black Death. It was compulsory for the Vicars to dine in hall until 1592. A range of administrative chambers was added in the early 15th century, including an exchequer, muniment room and treasury.

Turn left out of the Close and walk along St Andrew Street

The 15th century Rib on your right is the only survivor of three houses which were in the gift of the bishop, and which were known as the Bishop's Ribs. For some time this was the home of the Cathedral School headmaster and previously of the principal of the Theological College. It is now in private ownership. Tower House, from the 14th century, was the home of the Precentor, responsible for the Cathedral choir and the music. The building contains fabric from many centuries, including a medieval roof, blocked 14th century windows and a stir tower of the early 1500s. It was the birthplace of the novelist Elizabeth Gouge.

7. Walk on to the corner of the road

Ahead of you is the area now known as East Wells, which was the medieval suburb of Byestewalls. It formed part of the outparish until it was formally incorporated into the city by the 1835 Reform Act. Its medieval name must surely refer to the area outside the east wall of the Liberty, the area of Cathedral and associated properties which were under special jurisdiction.

At the pedestrian crossing, cross the road, turn left, and walk up the East Liberty.

The fourth house on the right-hand side of the road was built by Dr Claver Morris between 1699 and 1702. Morris was a physician who practiced in Wells and the surrounding area during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. His diary, which gives a fascinating insight into the town, has been published. Good examples are his entries for Dec 5th 1725: "I lent my sedan to Mr Baron of New Street to carry him both morning and evening to the Cathedral"; and for April 14th 1724: "I went to the Charity School....I suggested the inconvenience of apprenticing any of the Boys, unless lame ones: because it multiplied too much artificers and brought to the Army of Gallows." Next door to the left stands De Salis House, named after the Bishop of Taunton who lived there from 1911 to 1933. We know that there was a house here as early as 1330 when Thomas de Lechlade, vicar, was the resident. Two chancellors used the property in the 15th and 16th centuries. The present building may be 15th or 16th century, and is one of the most imposing medieval houses in the Liberty. It is now part of Wells Cathedral School.

The Cedars, the large 18th century house on the corner, was built for Charles Tudworth from a fortune made in the sugar plantations in Antigua. This fine classical house was built on the sites of three earlier buildings, one of which was the home of Adam Lock, Master Mason of the Cathedral during the building of the nave. Lock's house was allocated to the Cathedral School in 1235. From c1400



to 1547 a college of chantry priests stood on the site. The Cedars is now the main building of Wells Cathedral School. The cedar trees were planted by the eldest sons of the family on their 21st birthdays. One large tree blew down in the gale of 1987 and has been replaced by a sapling.

8. Turn left and walk along North Liberty

St Andrew's Lodge was built in 1713 to accommodate a charity school for boys, which subsequently became part of Wells Blue School (there was also a girls' school). Note the figure of St Andrew with his saltire cross above the doorway. Set back behind St Andrew's Lodge is the Canon's Barn, a unique 12th century aisled barn, which once stored the provisions of the Dean and Chapter. It was much rebuilt in the 19th century and is now part of the Cathedral School. Polydore House next door has a charming shell hood. This is another of the Cathedral School's buildings and was formerly a medieval canon's house. Inside there is a marvelous arch-braced roof.

9. Walk to the end of North Liberty, and then bear left into New Street, and left again into Sadler Street.

The Ancient Gatehouse Hotel contains 15th century fabric, and incorporates part of Brown's Gatehouse. The buildings on this east side of Sadler Street have been built over the site of the Liberty Wall. The Swan Hotel was mentioned in city records in 1422 when it

was rented by the Corporation to John and Isabel Pury for 46 shillings 8 pence a year. It was largely rebuilt in the 16th century. For many years it was the banqueting hall of the mayor and burgesses. In 1613 a feast was held here in honour of Queen Anne of Denmark. Later, when it became an important coaching inn, a new front was added.

Walk down Sadler Street to the corner of the Market Place.



The Conduit was built in the late 18th century to replace the medieval one built by Bishop Bekynton, which stood close to the High Cross. The Cross has sadly been lost, but the Conduit and the sparkling spring water which flows down the Blue Lias gutters of the High Street are among the city's best-loved features.

10. The shorter trail ends here in the Market Place. For the longer trail turn right and walk down the High Street.

Almost all of the buildings in the High Street have facades from the early 19th century, although many of these conceal much earlier origins. In the widest part of the street stood the medieval shambles, known as Middle Row, with the Linen Hall raised above them.

Where Broad Street leads off to the left, continue down the High Street, which becomes much narrower and joins St Cuthbert Street.

The City Arms Inn, on the corner of Queen Street, was both an inn and the city gaol in the 16th century. Elizabeth I granted the right to operate a gaol to the city, previously the bishop had operated the only prison. Some of the cells still exist, although the building was damaged by fire in 1746.

11. Walk on to the corner of Priest Row which is adjacent to St Cuthbert's churchyard

St Cuthbert's Church, the largest parish church in Somerset, is mainly 14th and 15th century, but a Norman piscine shows that there has been a church here since at least the 12th century. The dedication to St Cuthbert may suggest that there was a church here as early as the 9th century. Originally the church had a central tower, the west tower was added c1410. For over a century the church had two towers, until the central one collapsed in 1561. Inside there is a magnificent painted roof.



Llewellyn's Almshouses were founded in 1614, and rebuilt in stages between 1887 and 1901. They were the bequest of Henry Llewellyn, who left £1,600 for the purchase of a site and the construction of almshouses for ten elderly women. Each was to have a parlour, bedroom and garden. No.10 Priest Row is a 15th century priest's house which once provided accommodation for the priests of St Cuthbert's church

12. Continue along Priest Row, turn left and walk a little way down Chamberlain Street to see Bubwith's Almshouses.

Bubwith's Almshouses were the gift of Bishop Bubwith in the early 15th century. Their earlier form was as a single-storey building, with a chapel in the east and a hall to the west. A central chamber served 12 cubicles or chambers. When the first floor was added later the accommodation was doubled. The inmates were to be poor men and women burgesses of the city. The chapel served the residents of the almshouses. The hall at the east end served as the common room, as the board room for meetings of the Trust and for some three centuries as the city's Guildhall until the Town Hall in the Market Place was built in 1779.

Situated between Bubwith's Almshouses and St Cuthbert's churchyard are three later sets of almshouses. The Still Almshouses, built by Bishop Still in 1614 for "six poor and decayed tradesmen". The Bricke Almshouses, established in 1688 by woolen draper Walter Bricke for four poor burgesses of the city. And then in the 18th century Bishop Wiles left money with which the accommodation was increased to include four more men. This important complex of almshouses can be seen from St Cuthbert's churchyard. **Walk up Chamberlain Street.**

Notice the ornamental gate pier on the left-hand side of the road, the only survivor of a pair of early 18th century piers at the entrance to the former stables of No. 40 Chamberlain Street.

Harper's Almshouses, no. 28 on the left-hand side of the road, are marked with a stone tablet. Accommodation for five poor decayed woolcombers was provided by the bequest of Archibald Harper in 1711. The wool trade was in such decline by 1732 that it was agreed that if there were no decayed woolcombers in need of accommodation, then other genuinely poor persons might be admitted. The building, which was Harper's own dwelling, has a predominantly 18th century appearance but probably contains some medieval fabric. Further up Chamberlain Street, on the same side, is the former Elim Church. The building here, which had been used temporarily as a convent by Carmelite nuns, was bought for use as an Elim tabernacle in 1937. On the other side of the road is the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph and St Teresa. In 1875 a community of Carmelite nuns came to Wells from Plymouth. A convent and church were established, and later another house in Chamberlain Street was acquired to serve as the presbytery. In 1972 the convent was closed, and the nuns moved north to Darlington.

13. At the top of Chamberlain Street, turn right into Sadler Street, then left into the Market Place, where the trail ends.

Wells City Trail



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www.wellssomerset.com

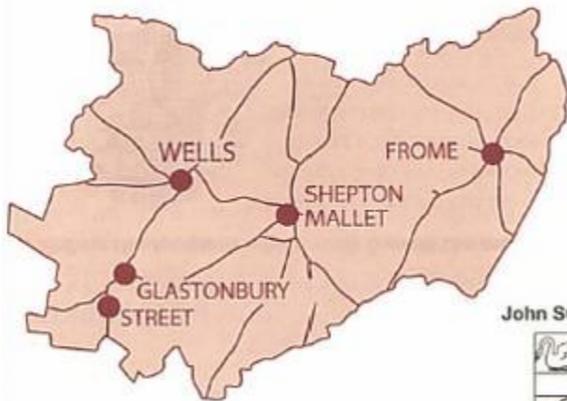
Approx 3 miles taking 1½ hours



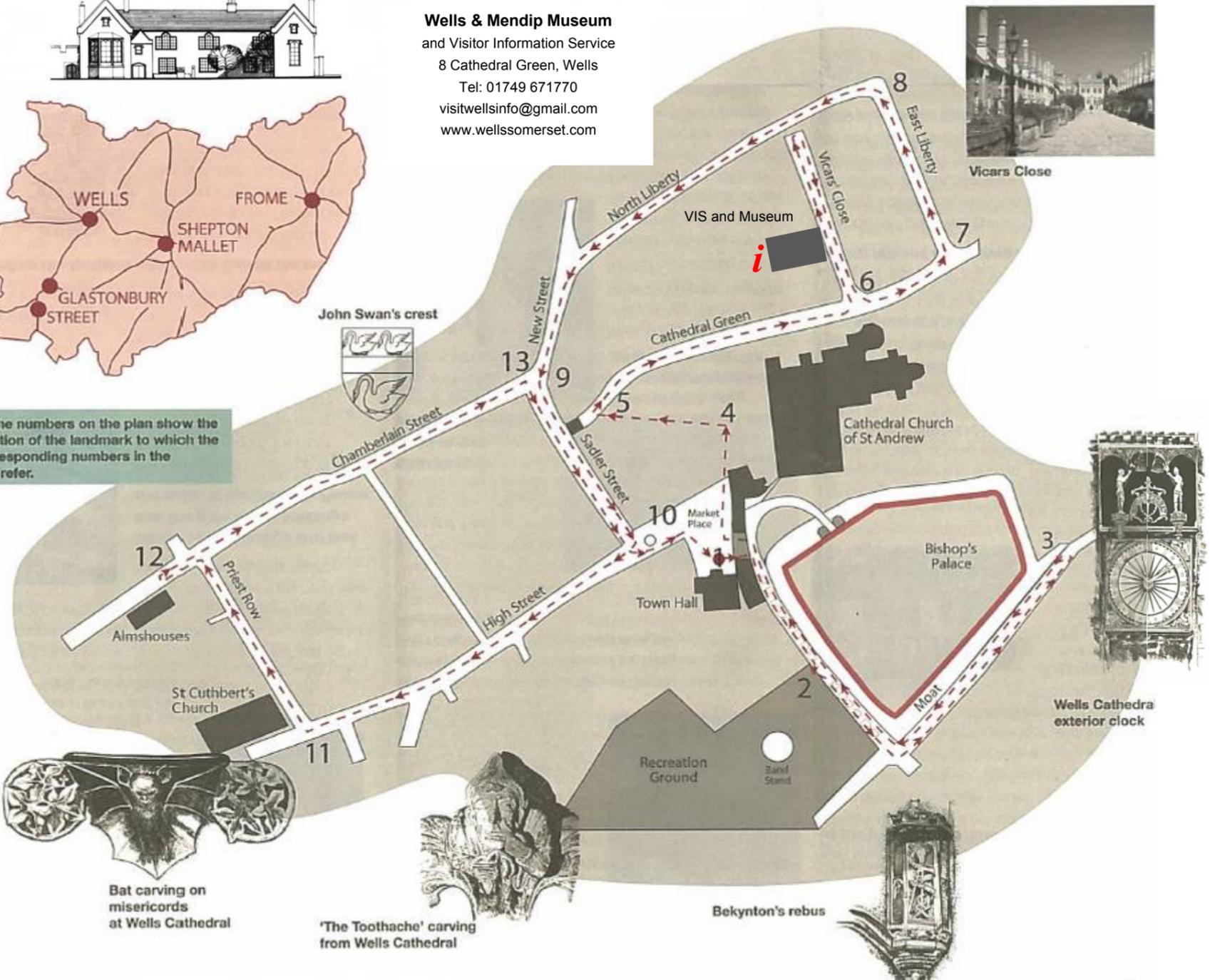
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Vicars Close



All the numbers on the plan show the location of the landmark to which the corresponding numbers in the text refer.



Bat carving on misericords at Wells Cathedral



'The Toothache' carving from Wells Cathedral



Bekynton's rebus



Wells Cathedral exterior clock