

To Max Gate via the water meadows

Note: This route is unsuitable for wheelchair users and part of it can become muddy after wet weather.

Turn left out of the Casterbridge and walk east out of town. You cross the mill stream within a few yards and then follows nearly a quarter of a mile of rather dull road, few of the buildings here are old and Hardy knew it as a raised road between meadows.



The first landmark is Grey's Bridge over the River Frome. Read the notice on the bridge as you pass.



Turn right through a kissing gate onto the riverside footpath immediately after the bridge. The path follows the River Frome for the next half mile.

All these riverside fields are derelict water meadows. First walk a short way along the riverbank until, looking across the river through the screen of trees, you see a gaudily painted steam roller. This was one of many that belonged to the Eddison company about which more later. This one was given to the town when it became redundant and it has been parked in a children's play area as a climb-on toy for over forty years. The colours are not the Eddison livery but whatever the Town Council Parks Department thinks will delight the children.



If the grass is not too long it is worth crossing to the other side of the meadow at this point and peering over the hedge and ditch that border the eastern side. The ditch was a water



meadow carrier and along it were several hatches. Nowadays all there is to see are the remains of tiny bridges with, sometimes, some rotting timbers. When Thomas Hardy walked these meadows they were

in full working order and each structure controlled levels and diverted flows to where they were needed.

Return to the riverside footpath and at the end of the meadow go through one of the gates on to the farm track that continues along the river bank and follow it for a hundred yards or so and turn right across a dilapidated brick bridge, known as Long Bridge. In later life Hardy would cross this bridge every time he walked to or from Stinsford or his childhood home at Bockhampton. His route lay further east along the track that now leads under the bypass. From here we follow his footsteps home to Max Gate.



A few yards after crossing the bridge:

Either: Turn left alongside some allotment gardens and under the bypass. At the end of the track cross St. George's road and take the footpath opposite.

Or: Follow the track until it meets St. George's road. Turn left and follow the road under the bypass. A few yards after the bypass a postbox attached to a pole on the right marks the start of a footpath that runs uphill through the trees along what was a country road in Hardy's day.



Follow the path until it meets the railway at a foot crossing.

Take care crossing the railway, trains approaching from the east (left) do so at speed and with little warning. Hardy knew this as a full sized level crossing and there were two lines to cross.

Hardy was a child of the railway era, this line opened in 1847 when he was seven. He must have seen the smoke and heard the thunder of trains every day as he walked to and from school and after building Max Gate in 1885 he could note their passing from his back windows.

Once over the line you are in Syward Road, follow the road uphill to its end. For the last few yards you are walking alongside the brick wall of Max Gate on your right. Hardy would probably have used the back gate but we must go around to the front entrance which now faces a short stretch of redundant highway. The front gate used to open on to the main Dorchester to Wareham road but a realignment scheme has moved the traffic a short distance south.

Completing the circle

For a full description of the landmarks on the rest of the circle see the 'To Max Gate via Fordington' section.

It is easier to find The Casterbridge from Max Gate than the other way around. On leaving Max Gate turn right and cross the bypass bridge, go straight on at the roundabout and cross the railway bridge (it's safest to use the footbridge on the south side of the road.) At the mini roundabout take the right exit into Allington Road; you will see the tower of the church in front of you. At the second mini roundabout at Fordington Cross go straight on towards the church tower again. Follow this road past the church to its end where you will be within sight of the Casterbridge.



To Max Gate via Fordington

Note: This route is paved throughout and is suitable for any wheelchair user who can manage a couple of low hills.

Turn Left out of the Casterbridge then immediately cross the road and turn right into High Street Fordington. This road bends left at once, follow it up the hill to St George's Church and Fordington Green.

At the top of the hill, shortly before reaching the church you pass a bricked up gateway under a magnificent copper beech tree. This is all that remains of the vicarage once occupied by the



Reverend Henry Moule, scholar and sanitary innovator who, in response to local outbreaks of cholera, invented a remarkably successful, portable, dry-earth closet which was adopted in many parts of the world where water closets were impractical.

The Hardy family worshipped regularly in St. George's church and he retained a connection with it for most of his life. The church is worth a visit for its mix of styles and for



two ancient carvings: A Roman memorial tablet is displayed near the foot of the tower and a fine, early mediaeval, bas-relief of St. George at Antioch decorates the tympanum above the inner entrance door.

The church faces Fordington Green, a small, traditional, village green. Continue along High Street Fordington and, just before descending the hill on the far side notice the sarsen stone on the corner. Local children were told that King Arthur sat upon this stone whenever he came to Fordington. Anyone who copies him will find the stone both cold and hard. Let us hope he brought a cushion or at least wore thick trousers. Hardy found a similar stone when building Max Gate and erected it in the garden as a

Admission:

The house now belongs to The National Trust.

At time of writing: *Open on three afternoons per week for a small charge, other times by appointment.*

Details: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-maxgate>

Contact: 01305 162538

maxgate@nationaltrust.org.uk

mock druidical monument.

At the bottom of the hill cross the road, it is a mini-roundabout but Hardy knew it as Fordington cross roads, angle a little to the right and take Allington Road (avoid branching into St. George's Road unless you want to join the later stage of the water meadow route.)



Soon Allington Road joins Allington Avenue by a mini-roundabout, carry on up the hill and cross the railway bridge (it's safer on the right hand side where the footway has its own, separate, bridge.) To the right of this stretch before the railway are a few businesses on the site of the old Eddison Steam Ploughing Company yard, the work's whistle of which used to annoy Hardy as it announced the start of work at 5.45 am.

Go straight on at the next roundabout (the adjacent public house is modern and has no direct Hardy connection.) Cross the bridge over the bypass and immediately turn left onto a short stretch of redundant high road, Max Gate's is the only entrance along this road which serves as a parking space for visitors.

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You are responsible for your own safety. The route shown is only a suggestion. Follow the countryside code and take due care when walking on roads, alongside water and when crossing the railway, especially so after wet weather. Information here was checked at time of writing but the countryside changes continually. Neither Derek Moody nor The Casterbridge are liable for loss or injury incurred on this walk.

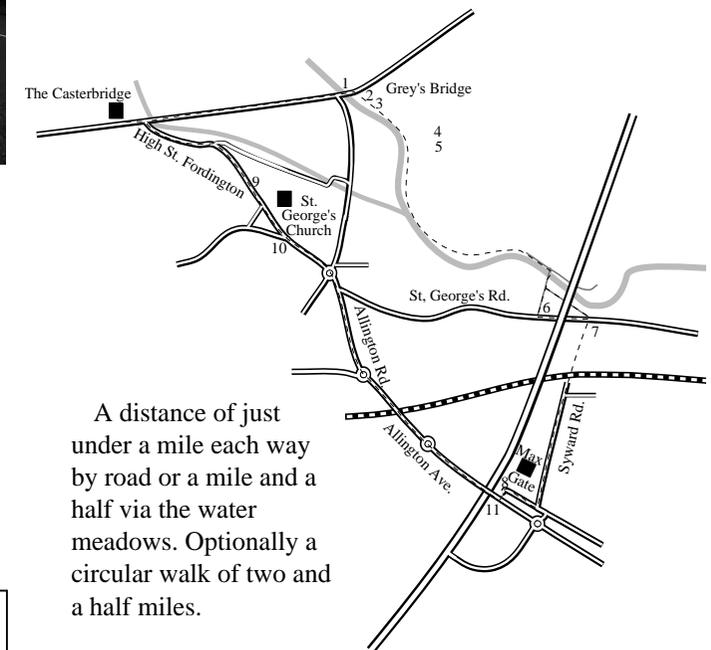
Walking to Max Gate from: THE CASTERBRIDGE

49 High East Street, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1HU
Tel: 01305 246043 Fax: 01305 260884

WWW: <http://www.thecasterbridge.co.uk/>

E-mail: reception@thecasterbridge.co.uk

Author Thomas Hardy coined the name Casterbridge. In 1885 he designed and built the villa 'Max Gate' on the eastern outskirts of Dorchester. All his later works were written there.



A distance of just under a mile each way by road or a mile and a half via the water meadows. Optionally a circular walk of two and a half miles.

The terrain on the water meadow route includes unmade field path and farm tracks. It is unsuitable for a wheelchair. The route along the roads is paved throughout and is accessible by wheelchairs including powered wheelchairs.