

Introduction

The Parish of Beckington stands on the eastern side of the valley of the River Frome some eight miles south of Bath. The main A36 road which links Bath with Southampton and Portsmouth used to pass through the village, but since the new bypass was opened in November 1989 the main village street has been a good deal quieter.



Beckington has a long history. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book and the parish church has Norman features. Thomas Beckington, Bishop of Bath and Wells, was born here circa 1390. He was responsible for a good deal of additional building in the environs of Wells Cathedral, including the two gates out of the Market Place, the Bishop's Eye which leads to the Bishop's Palace and Penniless Porch which leads to Cathedral Green and the West Front of the Cathedral. He was also responsible for the conduit that takes water from the Bishop's Garden into the Market Place for the use of the people of the town. He died in 1465. During the 17th and 18th centuries Beckington became a place of some importance due to the local woollen industry. Evidence of this remains in the larger houses in the centre of the village and the clothiers' marks to be seen in the church. Today it is very much a dormitory for Bath and local towns such as Frome and Trowbridge although some businesses continue to thrive including Systems Engineering and Assessment Ltd. at the Castle.



There are four pubs in the parish: The Woolpack and The Foresters in Beckington, The Full Moon in Rudge. And The Bell at Standerwick. The Cross Keys at Rode is a nearby pub that is also on a parish walk. There is a garage, Beckington Motors, and The Mes Amis gift & coffee shop in the main street but unfortunately the Post Office closed in 1999 and the grocery shop a few years earlier.

Although the village lacks shops for everyday needs there is now a well stocked farm shop at White Row Farm and a Travel Lodge, petrol station and M& S Simply Foods at the service station on the by pass. There is a thriving First School and at the Bath end of the village there is a sports field and recreation ground and a fine village hall for functions, clubs and societies. In short there is everything needed for a successful and thriving community.

As an introduction to a series of guides to parish walks it would seem helpful to say something more detailed about the countryside around the village. At first sight the landscape around Beckington is without any striking features and much of the ground is relatively level. Most of the area is underlain by almost horizontal beds of the Forest Marble Formation and is capped by patches of Cornbrash. These rocks were named by William Smith, the "Father of English Geology", when he was employed as the surveyor for the Somerset Coal Canal and lived at High Littleton and later at Midford. He it was that produced the world's first geological map of the area around Bath. Later in 1801 he produced a map of the geology of the whole of England and Wales. This ground-breaking document still hangs behind a pair of sky blue curtains beside a marble staircase in the premises of the Geological Society in London and so these names are of some historical importance.

The Forest Marble is described as a mudstone but it has many local variations. Around Frome and Beckington there are frequent beds of shelly limestone and most of the older houses and walls are built of it. In some places there are patches of soft sandstone and one occurs in Beckington, hence the name, "Sandy Lane". The Cornbrash is another shelly limestone but it is very well known to geologists because it contains well preserved fossils of a great variety of sea creatures including many species of shell fish and sea urchins, as well as ammonites and some corals. As it tends to break up into smaller pieces the soils are full of stones. Around here stony soils are described as "brashy" and as the land is good for growing corn that was how the rock acquired its name.

Within this area of level or gently sloping land there are however two areas of more scenic interest. On the western edge of the parish lies the valley of the River Frome. This river is a major tributary of the River Avon and it carries a great deal of the drainage from the Mendip Hills. It is a winding valley with a flat alluvial floor and the valley sides stand as high as thirty metres above the river making it a very pleasant and contrasting element in the parish landscape. Less striking, but no less interesting, is Rudge Hill, a ridge of higher ground running south-west to north-east across the south-east corner of the parish. Approached from the south, with the hamlet of Rudge tumbling down its southern flanks, or from the north along Rudge Lane it is a really noticeable feature. The rocks of which it is made are no different from those in the rest of the parish so why is the ridge there at all?



In fact the northern and southern sides of the ridge are bounded by two sets of faults, the Rudge Hill Faults to the north and the Standerwick Faults to the south. Movement along these faults has left the rocks in between relatively uplifted so forming the ridge. Another clue to the existence of these faults is the valley of the little stream that flows north-eastwards near Waterslade. This valley has been excavated by the stream along a line of weakness in the rocks due to the presence of the Rudge Hill Faults.

Even more interesting is the reason why these major fault systems are here in the first place. They are in fact a north-eastwards projection of the line of the Mendip Hills. The folded rocks that form the Mendips disappear beneath younger rocks in the vicinity of Spring Gardens on the northern edge of Frome. In fact the Mendips don't end at Frome. They actually continue beneath the surface underneath Rudge and run towards Swindon at increasing depth. If you were to drill down through the rocks at Scotland Farm on Rudge Hill you would quite soon pass from relatively young Jurassic rocks at the surface into quite ancient Devonian Sandstones. These rocks are part of the buried Mendip Hills and the hamlet of Rudge quite literally sits on top of the Mendips!

The production of a guide to walks in the Parish of Beckington stems from a decision of the Parish Council in 2002 to carry out an audit of the footpaths around the village. When this was completed a list of the desired improvements was sent to the Footpaths Officer at Mendip District Council, who agreed to set the work in hand when the resources became available.



Meanwhile, in anticipation of this being done, the Parish Council decided to set about designing a series of circular walks which would encourage the residents to make greater use of our footpaths as well as providing a resource for visitors.

The result is a set of seven circular walks which lie largely within the parish, and two longer ones, all of which stray into the surrounding countryside. For each walk there is an accompanying map as well as a description of the walk. As far as possible the walks make use of footpaths, and as a result they can be very

wet and muddy, as well as somewhat overgrown by vegetation in summer. It is therefore advisable to wear clothing and footwear appropriate to the expected conditions. Unfortunately the parish is also crossed by two main roads, the A36 and the A361, and it is impossible to make use of our footpaths adequately without having to cross them from time to time.

The routes chosen, vary from just under three miles to about seven miles in length. It is of course possible to mix and match the different walks, to make them either shorter or longer, and to provide variety. A possible combination of the Orchardleigh Walk and the Henham Bridge Walk is in fact suggested in the text. A map of the parish showing all the footpaths has been included to make the planning of your own routes easier to do. It would also be a good idea to consult the appropriate Ordnance Survey Explorer maps Sheet 142 Shepton Mallet and Mendip Hills East, and Sheet 143 Warminster and Trowbridge.

For convenience, and perhaps also for refreshment, all the walks begin at either the Woolpack in the centre of Beckington, or at the Full Moon at Rudge. Some of the walks also include one of two other local hostleries: the Cross Keys at Rode and The Bell at Standerwick.



The work to improve the footpaths was finally agreed in February 2004 and the members of the Mendip

Ramblers Work Party carried out the task between July and October 2004. These walks were brought up to date during the first and second lock down phases of the 2020-2021 Corona Virus pandemic, again with members of the Ramblers Association.