

# WELLINGTON, WROCKWARDINE AND DOTHILL, SHROPSHIRE

**A 6.5 mile circular walk connecting the ancient Shropshire market town of Wellington to the former estate of the wardens of the Wrekin Forest at Dothill Local Nature Reserve.**

En-route the trail offers fine views of the famous Shropshire landmark, passing through the historic village of Wrockwardine, the former spa resort of Admaston and the impressive grounds of an old stately home at Apley Park.

**FACILITIES:** Tourist information, a cafe and public toilets (which can only be accessed during booking office opening hours) are available at Wellington rail station. Pay toilets are located at the bus station on The Parade, while free facilities are available at Wellington Civic Centre in Larkin Way. Cafes, restaurants and pubs can also be found across Wellington town centre, and in Admaston village.

## Getting there

The walk starts and finishes at Wellington rail station, making it ideal for arriving by public transport. If you are coming by car, the station only has a small car park for rail users, so the best parking is a long stay pay-and-display car park accessed from Tan Bank (the Belmont-Tan Bank Car Park), just a short walk from the station.

Approximate post code for this parking, **TF1 1HJ**.

## Walk Sections

### **1 Start to Vineyard Road**

Wellington Railway Station opened in 1849 on land formerly belonging to All Saints parish churchyard, which is situated on high ground above the track. As a mark of respect to the location's former inhabitants, crosses were incorporated into the building's ironwork, on the awning of platform one and within two weather vanes bookending the building itself. Local folklore dictates that mortal remains removed during construction of the railway were dumped on the edge of town. Later on our route we shall encounter the supposed location of that gruesome episode at Bony Bank!

The current All Saints parish church (which you will pass shortly) dates from 1797 and is at least the third building

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*Moderate Terrain*

**6.5 miles  
Circular  
2.5 to 3 hours**

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## Access Notes

1. The route is largely on the level with several gentle gradients around Wrockwardine and a total ascent of just 157 metres.
2. There is some road walking where you will be sharing the highway with vehicular traffic on public roads between Wellington, Wrockwardine and Admaston.
3. On several paths, walkers also share joint access with cyclists.
4. There is a kissing gate to negotiate within Apley Woods, along with five flights of steps. In spring and summer, Dothill Local Nature Reserve and Apley Woods are significant local sites for breeding birds, especially wildfowl.
5. Please keep dogs under control at all times and do not allow them to disturb the local wildlife.





on the site. It replaced a late Medieval edifice that was badly damaged during a Royalist siege in the English Civil War. The Lychgate forming the entrance from Church Street into its hallowed grounds was erected in 1922 to commemorate the many Wellingtonians who sacrificed their lives during the Great War.

The original Anglo Saxon settlement of Wellington was founded around 700AD and located on the far side of the churchyard, beyond the imposing Bowring Gates, on a triangular patch of land known as the Green (which is now a car park). It remained at the centre of local affairs until the town received its first market charter in 1244, when the lord of the manor drove Church Street around All Saints into a new Market Square. The street grid that radiated from it is largely unchanged. In New Street the characteristically long, narrow footprints of many shops are a direct link to the original 'burgage tenements' established to entice traders to the fledgling town.

Like Wellington's street grid, Ten Tree Croft (which you will also pass in this section) also bears the hallmarks of its Medieval origins. This slender passage was the place where woollen cloth was hung out to dry on elongated frames. The name is actually a derivation of 'Tenter Croft', a reference to the hooks used to affix material to those frames. Cloth making was a significant industry in Wellington's development during the Middle Ages and its influence is commemorated in other local street names, such as Walker Street, which was the place where fullers literally walked on the cloth to remove impurities.

**DIRECTIONS:** Leave the station via the booking hall on platform two and walk to the top of Station Road. Turn right into Church Street, cross over the railway bridge and past the Lych Gate entrance to All Saints Church on your right. Just before the street curves around the churchyard, look for an archway through the buildings on your left-hand side with a sign reading Ten Tree Croft above it. Walk through this arch and passage until it opens out into a car park. Turn right and leave via the main exit. At the junction, walk straight across Queen Street into Charlton Street, which leads directly to a T-junction with Vineyard Road.

## 1 → 2 Vineyard Road to Wrockwardine Road Rail Bridge

Vineyard Road takes its name from the imposing Georgian mansion house perched above the roundabout at the supermarket end of the street, although to see it you may need to peer over the rooftops of the intrusive modern housing estate insensitively built in its grounds. The property was completed in 1721 for St. John Charlton Chiverton Charlton (yes, really), whose family seat at Apley — more about that stately pile later — had become somewhat ruinous; much like the second incarnation of All Saints church, it suffered extensive Civil War damage and was eventually rebuilt.



The Charlton's considerable influence on local affairs can be gauged by the many places in which the family name appears, not least Charlton Street itself, which formed our approach to Vineyard Road. Many fine properties can be viewed along this once fashionable edge-of-town thoroughfare, which was once known as Mansion House Lane. Although it is not so near the countryside as it once was, the setting will soon become increasing rural in tone as we move through Spring Hill into Wrockwardine Road.

**DIRECTIONS:** At the T-junction, turn left into Vineyard Road and walk towards the large roundabout. Taking the pavement on the right-hand side negates the need to cross this busy island, offering traffic-free passage to the junction with a side road, North Road. Cross over and walk through Spring Hill to the junction of Admaston Road and Orleton Lane. Carry straight on along Wrockwardine Road to the bridge carrying the railway between Shrewsbury and Wellington.

## 2 → 3 Wrockwardine Road Rail Bridge to Wrockwardine Village



As the trail approaches the bridge carrying the railway over Wrockwardine Road, we reach the supposed resting place of the mortal remains removed from All Saints Church to accommodate the line. Whether this is really Bony Bank or not, what we can say with certainty is that this was once a very busy junction. The cycling and walking track that leaves the road on the left-hand side here, a couple of hundred yards before the bridge, was the beginning of the mainline to Crewe via Market Drayton. The 30-mile artery was once an important freight route linking the West Midlands and the North West but fell victim to the infamous Beeching Report and was eventually lifted around 1970.

Beyond the railway bridge, Wrockwardine Road becomes distinctly more rural in nature and the familiar breaching outlines of The Ercall and The Wrekin quickly rear into view across the Orleton estate. This is the first, and only surviving example, of Wellington's three great country piles, the remnants of which will all be encountered before we arrive back in the town centre.



Orleton is rumoured to be the location where, at the head of his army, Charles I declared war on Parliament in 1642. However, its owners, the Cludde family, remained steadfastly neutral during the ensuing conflict, so it seems unlikely the famous 'Wellington Declaration' was made there.

**DIRECTIONS:** Follow the road under the bridge that carries the railway overhead and continue for almost a mile, along a gently rising gradient to the triangular junction with The Avenue in Wrockwardine village itself.

## 3 → 4 Wrockwardine Village to Admaston



Until the Romans arrived in 47AD, The Wrekin was the principal hillfort of the Cornovii, who ruled an extensive kingdom stretching from the Wirral to modern day south Shropshire. Following the invasion, the Celtic tribe moved just down the road to the Roman town-cum-military camp at Wroxeter, which was known thereafter as Viroconium-Cornoviorum (Viroconium of the Cornovii). Sometime after the Romans left, around 500AD, the settlement was destroyed by fire and it may have been that its inhabitants resettled much nearer the hill again. In Old English, Wrockwardine means the 'enclosure by The Wrekin' and the village was recorded as belonging to the Wreosensaete (the people of The Wrekin) in the Anglo-Saxon Tribal Hidage tax document, suggesting it may have been viewed as a sub-kingdom of Mercia between the Seventh and Ninth centuries.

The centrepiece of modern day Wrockwardine is St Peters parish church, which dates from the mid-Twelfth Century and has an unusual cruciform plan. Three of the six bells within its central tower have an intimate connection to Wellington, having been manufactured in the town by the Clibury family. Their foundry made bells for over 70 Shropshire churches between 1590 and 1699 and other examples can be found nearby in Wroxeter (the site of Viroconium-Cornoviorum) and Upton Magna.

Wrockwardine lies on high ground with commanding views over the vast expanse of the north Shropshire plain, which may help explain its regal status as a former Royal manor. Until the late 1500s, the villagers still held special rights to graze their cattle all across the Weald Moors, the largest area of wetland in the east of the county. The wide expanses of these peat moorlands, which owe their existence to cataclysmic events at the end of the last Ice Age, form the backdrop as we head downhill towards Admaston.

**DIRECTIONS:** At the end of The Avenue, a pair of distinctive almshouses (built in 1841 in memory of Edward Cludde of Orleton Hall) frames the triangular junction. Turn right, carry straight on until you reach the corner of St Peter's churchyard and bear right again into Station Road. Follow the lane out of the village to its junction with the B4394. Turn right, walk over

the railway bridge and continue along Station Road into Admaston village (NOTE: Motorists have poor visibility at this junction, so take extra care).

## 4 → 5 Admaston to Tee Lake



Just before we reach Admaston proper, the main road snakes over the mainline from Shrewsbury to Wellington and past the site of Admaston Station, which closed in 1960. The railways played a transformatory role in the life of the village during the Victorian era, when it briefly enjoyed the fashionable status of a 'spa' resort. The therapeutic qualities of the local iron- and sulphur-bearing springs were such a hit with visitors that a bathhouse and hotel opened here. Sadly, the boom time proved to be short-lived and by the end of the 19th Century the facility had closed.

While the spa itself is no more, the building that once housed it still survives near the centre of the village and the trail skirts the southern edge of the property as we enter the Beanhill Valley. It forms part of the wider Dothill Local Nature Reserve, a meandering patchwork of open grassland, wet woodland, pasture, scrub and mature hedgerow. As you might expect of such varied habitat, this is a notable haven for plants, animals and insects, many of which you would not normally find in such close proximity. For instance, at least 82 bird species have been recorded here. They include seed-eating farmland classics like Linnet, Yellowhammer and Skylark and waders that favour wet ground in which to probe for invertebrates, such as Lapwing, Curlew and Snipe. Woodland birdlife is equally well represented with Woodcock, Willow Tit and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker all among the rarities sighted amid the Oak, Ash and Alder stands that predominate here.

**DIRECTIONS:** Near the centre of Admaston, the main road passes The Pheasant public house on the right and then crosses an overbridge traversing the former Wellington-Crewe railway line. Immediately after the bridge, turn right down a steep tarmac bank onto the old trackbed itself, which now forms part of the Silkin Way (we also join the main route of the long-distance Shropshire Way at this point). At the bottom, turn left and continue until you reach a path heading up the cutting slope on the left-hand side (a set of steps are also located nearby). At the top, turn left and follow the path eastwards across the Beanhill Brook, past Millennium Wood and the Wellingtonia Ring, before reaching Tee Lake.

## 5 → 6 Tee Lake to Whitchurch Drive

Dothill Local Nature Reserve offers some fine views of The Wrekin, but the connection between these two wild spaces runs much deeper. If you think Tee Lake displays a somewhat ornamental appearance, you would be right because it once





formed part of the Dothill Park estate. From the early 1600s, it was the home of the Forester family, the hereditary wardens of The Wrekin since Medieval times and owners of much of the woodland around the hill. Sometime before 1726 they remodelled Dothill, laying out 7-acres of formal gardens and adding many new features, including a grass amphitheatre and a canalised moat. Many of those changes had reverted back to nature by the end of the 1700s and the Foresters eventually departed themselves, to Willey Park near Much Wenlock. The house itself was demolished in the 1950s leaving the reserve as the only reminder of the area's stately past.

The reserve's wetland features are Dothill's crowning glory and support many aquatic species. Great Crested Newts thrive in the type of small well-connected pools found here, while larger water bodies such as Tee Lake are important late-winter spawning grounds for toads and frogs. The many insects that thrive in this environment also draw in larger predators higher up the food chain. Six bat species, including Noctule (the UK's largest), have been recorded at Dothill, while many summer migrant birds, such as Grasshopper Warbler and Sedge Warbler, frequent the water's edge. More information about the reserve is available from the Friends of Dothill website ([www.dothillnaturereserve-friends.com](http://www.dothillnaturereserve-friends.com)).

**DIRECTIONS:** Continue on the footpath around Tee Lake, cross Severn Drive and follow the Shropshire Way discs until that route turns off to the right (shortly after a play area). At this point, continue straight ahead on the Silkin Way for a short distance until reaching Harley Close. Turn right and then take the next left at Severn Drive. Follow the road as it bends around to the right to meet the severed end of Whitchurch Road, once the main northern route out of Wellington. Turn right onto Whitchurch Road and take the shared footpath and cycleway immediately to your left, before shortly bearing left again to cross the bridge over the bypass road (Whitchurch Drive) that replaced it.

## 6 → 7 Whitchurch Drive to Apley Pool

As we cross over Whitchurch Drive, we set foot into the third of Wellington's great estates, Apley Castle. Widely recognised as one of Shropshire's finest stately homes, the ancient seat of the Charlton family (which was allegedly the inspiration for PG Wodehouse's Blandings) eventually ran out of caring heirs, and luck, in the mid-1950s when it was bulldozed into its cellars! What we have been left with, much like Dothill, is the core of an historic park nestling amid the modern-day development that continues to nibble at its edges.

The centrepiece of Apley is its pool, which was remodelled from a clay pit dug to provide bricks for the Georgian incarnation of the property, erected in 1794. It was at least the third and final house to be built within these grounds yet, somewhat ironically, the only surviving example is its Elizabethan predecessor. Its partial remains, which also include a doorway and window from



the original 14th Century house, are located close to the park entrance at the end of Apley Castle road. A walled garden associated with the property also survives, together with an icehouse and dovecote in the adjacent woodlands.

**DIRECTIONS:** At the other side of the footbridge over Whitchurch Drive, continue along the joint foot and cycle path until you reach the roadway. After a few yards, turn left through a gate onto a footpath. Go through the kissing gate on the right and follow the rough path along the edge of Pump Wood, keeping the trees to your right. Near Apley Pool, go through a gap in the fence on your right and walk through the woodland, now keeping the water's edge to your left. After about 100 yards you should arrive in open ground with the lakeside on your left.

## 7 → 8 Apley Pool to Wrekin College



The broad mix of grassland, woodland and open water within this 56-acre site offers many of the same advantages to local wildlife as Dothill. More uniquely, and as a direct result of its formal inheritance, Apley's woods have a very rich arboreal heritage that continues to be added to thanks to the ongoing work of a very active friends group. There are over 170 different tree species in these woods from all corners of the globe and some of the most impressive specimens can be viewed on a specially created 'tree trail' (details of which are on the Friends of Apley Woods website: [www.apleywoods.co.uk](http://www.apleywoods.co.uk)).

Within this stretch of our walk, after skirting the edge of Leegomery, the trail passes over Whitchurch Drive and back into Wellington. At the corner of Sutherland Avenue we will reach the opulent environs of Wrekin College, a private school established in the Victorian era to cater for the area's increasingly affluent mercantile classes. The foundation actually began life as Wellington College, but the name was later changed to avoid confusion with the town of the same name in Somerset.

Perhaps its most famous pupil is former Beatles manager Brian Epstein, who memorably recalled the series of events that led him to Shropshire in his autobiography 'A Cellarful of Noise':

“one by one, as examination followed interview and interview followed examination, the great public schools of England turned me down — Rugby and Repton and Clifton, and, no doubt, others”. Epstein spent two ‘listless’ years at Wrekin between 1948 and 1950 where, despite self-confessed academic under achievement, his amateur dramatic and artistic skills flourished to the extent that he wanted to leave in order to pursue a career as a dress designer. In the event, he completed his studies before returning to Liverpool to join the family furniture store in Walton.

**DIRECTIONS:** With your back to the water’s edge, walk ahead over the open grassland, directly away from the lake. Head up the steps through the trees, and up a further three flights that pass through the remnants of an ornamental garden that once led to the third, and final, Georgian incarnation of Apley Castle. At the top, turn right on the surfaced path and continue straight ahead, going down another flight of steps before arriving at a five-way footpath junction. Take the first left down an old avenue of Yew trees. At the next footpath junction, go left again and then take a right turn at the next signpost, leaving the reserve through a gate. Go straight ahead down the long drive before bearing right again, passing modern housing on both sides of the path, and then the Princess Royal Hospital on your right.

Cross Grainger Drive at the pedestrian crossing. Turn right, and take the second, rougher looking footpath on the left, crossing the grass and heading through the backs of the houses to Kingfisher Way. Once there, take the narrow path on the opposite side of the road and continue to Whitchurch Drive (Wellington’s eastern bypass road). Turn left and follow the roadside path until it rises towards an overbridge across the carriageway. Turn right, cross the bridge and follow the path (an old country lane) to College Lane. Turn left and follow the road to the junction of Sutherland Avenue and Leegomery Road, on the edge of Wrekin College campus.

## 8 → 9 Wrekin College to End



Wrekin College’s founder was Sir John Bayley who in 1880, and with just five pupils, established a small private school in a pair of semi-detached houses. This in itself was not particularly unusual in Victorian times and, as we turn from Roslyn Road into Albert Road, Sunfield House is just one example of numerous institutions that sprung up locally. However, Bayley was a unique and singular character and, through sheer force of will, was able to establish most of the campus we see today in the space of around twenty years. Much of the land was acquired from the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland (of nearby Lilleshall Hall), whose contribution is recognised in the name of the road that greets our arrival within the college precincts.

From the direction of Roslyn Road, the houses in which Bayley began Wrekin College are the first on the left-hand side of Albert Road. When we reach the crossroads at the top of Constitution Hill, the route downhill back into Wellington town centre passes

the former state-owned Constitution Hill School, where Bayley was previously headmaster. Here, in conditions he declared would ‘answer admirably to the purpose of a prison’, this mine worker’s son and former ‘pupil teacher’ achieved extraordinary results, attracting the attention of the area’s mercantile classes. Their desire to establish a local private school dovetailed with Bayley’s own ambitions and was essential in allowing him to fully realise his skills as an educationalist, for which this long-time friend of Lloyd George was eventually knighted.

**DIRECTIONS:** At the junction of Sutherland Avenue and Leegomery Road, go straight on and follow Roslyn Road along the edge of the cricket pitch to Sunfield House and the junction of Albert Road. Turn left and walk to the crossroads at the top of Constitution Hill. Turn right, head downhill to the junction with King Street and turn right again, continuing past the roundabout to a pedestrian refuge. Cross King Street, turn left and then right into the station car park, which leads downhill to platform one of the station itself.

This route was devised by:



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### Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

### Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and an Ordnance Survey map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.



