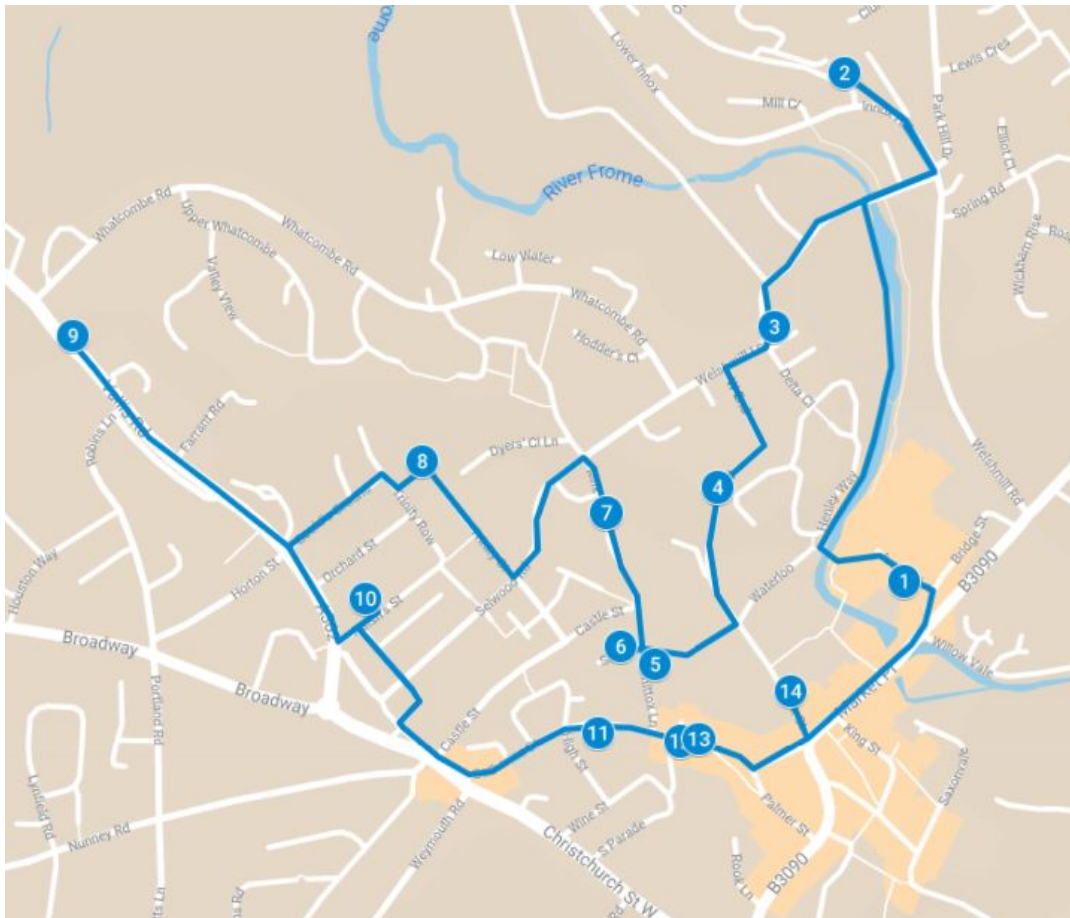


Discover Frome

Frome's Religious Buildings (West)

Approx. 2½-3 miles



Frome dates from around the 7th century when the Abbot of Malmesbury, St Aldhelm, founded a monastery here. The monastery has long since disappeared, however interesting religious buildings continue to dominate the skyline.

When the Book of Common Prayer was imposed on the nation in 1662, Nonconformity flourished in Frome, with congregations frequently quarrelling and splitting. In the 18th and 19th centuries, most of the town's clothiers – the mainstay of the commercial side of the town – were Nonconformists. Their employees were 'encouraged' to follow suit and thus the Anglican congregation was outnumbered by Nonconformists to a factor of 4 to 1. John Wesley noted that there were Anabaptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Arians, Antinonians, Moravians, etc.

Frome lays claim to over 350 listed buildings, many of which were built for religious purpose. This walk winds through the west section of town taking in several of them.

Information comes from a number of publications and sources and in the case of contradictions we have attempted to clarify this where possible.

Many of the featured buildings on the route are now houses - please respect the privacy of residents and owners of properties mentioned.

The route is accessible but steep in places.

START

1 Start at the Discover Frome Information Point. Turn left and cross the main car park to the Button Bridge. Cross the bridge, turn right along the river and continue until you meet Welshmill Lane. Cross the road, turn right and then second left into Welshmill Road. Cross this road carefully and continue to St Mary's Church.

2 St. Mary's Church (Grade II listed) is the second daughter church of St. John's. It was erected in 1863/4 as a delightful complex of church, vestry, church hall/schoolroom and priest's house. The Church Hall contains the original architectural drawings.

Retrace your steps to Welshmill Lane and turn right into it. Continue under the railway bridge. Across the road you can see Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.

3 Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses was built and funded by volunteers locally. The project began in March 1988 and was completed within 12 months with the first meeting held in spring 1989.

Cross the road at the next dropped kerb and continue up the hill. Turn left into the gated West End. Follow around the right and left bends. Look right and slightly behind and above to see West Hill House.

4 West Hill House - the Roman Catholic Sisters of Charity of St. Louis bought this and The Conigar (see below) in 1905 and it became their Convent by 1911. The building was expanded to include schoolrooms after WW1. After St. Louis Catholic Primary School (see 7) had opened West Hill House was sold.

The next property on the right is difficult to see behind the nearer modern properties. Conigar House (now Apex House), built in the late 1840s, was the home of the Anglican Sisters of Mercy who came to Frome with Rev. Bennett in 1852. They set up the second St. John the Baptist Home School (see 5 for first) here until 1878. In 1903 the Roman Catholic Sisters of Charity of St. Louis established St. Louis Convent School here until moving it to West Hill House in the 1950s.

The next property, The Conigar, now Conigre House, also difficult to see, was built in 1810 and bought by the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis in 1905 along with West Hill House. The Conigar became the Orphanage by 1911 until 1948 when it was sold.

The neighbouring Old Court House (once St. Catherine's Manor) includes the Gate House, the Old Chapel and the Grade II listed Old Presbytery. This is a complicated site and has undergone a number of changes of use. The Irvingite's Church was established in St. Catherine's Tower, now known as the Old Presbytery, until about 1850. St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Church then took over the site. In 1864 a new St. Catherine's Church (the Old Chapel) was built on this land, and St. Catherine's Tower became the Presbytery. St. Louis' Convent School took over in 1861 until 1902. The school then moved to Melrose House (see 5). St. Louis' Convent was established here in the early 1970s until the late 1970s when the nuns moved briefly to 13 Somerset Road before leaving Frome. The Roman Catholic Church moved to Park Street in 1928.

Turn right up Zion Path, just opposite Cork Street car park, and continue up to Whittox Lane to find the old Zion United Reformed Church building on your left and Melrose House on your right.

5 The Zion United Reformed Church, built in 1810, was set up by a breakaway group from Rook Lane Chapel and known originally as Congregational Independents. This refers probably to the north section, as the main building has a date of 1888. The building and the perimeter wall, gates, piers and railings are Grade II listed. The building is now home to RISE, with a cafe, bakery, gallery and rooms for hire. Zion Chapel, used by a Moravian sect in 1773 was where the Sunday School of 1875 now is (see 12).

Melrose House (Grade II* listed), built c.1690, was home to the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis' Convent and School from 1902. They moved to Conigar House (see 4) in 1903.

Keeping the old church building on your left, a little way up the hill is thought to be the site of the first St. John the Baptist Home School (originally at 26 Chappell Street, now Whittox), set up for orphans and the poor by Rev. Bennett in the 1850s.

Turn round and take the first left (opposite Melrose House) into Sun Street, originally called Chapel Street. Just ahead of you is Sun Street Chapel.

6 Now a private residence, Sun Street Chapel opened in 1834 for the Primitive Methodists.

Return to Whittox and continue uphill with Melrose House on your right. Sun Street Sunday School juts out on the left. Continue ahead into Milk Street.

To the right is the rear of St. Catherine's Church (the Old Chapel) (see 4) with the large three-leaf 'Trinity' window.

A Chemist Shop owned by a Mr Seagram was somewhere in Milk Street and licensed for Baptist services. On Seagram's death, the Baptists moved elsewhere and his widow invited Methodists to take services until 1751 when magistrates closed it down as being unlicensed for Methodists.

Continue up Milk Street to Vallis First School.

7 A Rechabite Chapel was erected on this site in 1840, closing three years later.

Continuing to the end of Milk street, just down on the right is St. Louis Catholic Primary School, created next door to West Hill House (see 4) in 1970. The temporary buildings were replaced over the years until completion to its current form in 2008.

Walk uphill into Selwood Road. Cross the road carefully at the dropped kerb (top of the hill) and continue on. Turn right into Trinity Street. The first half of this street was originally known as Cross Street and somewhere here was once the Providence Chapel, opened in 1849 and home to the Particular Baptists. At the far end of Trinity Street is Holy Trinity Church.

8 Holy Trinity Church (Grade II* listed) was built in 1838. This area was known originally as Woadground and then Newtown, built to house weavers in the 16th century, but is now commonly known as Trinity. The church has nine stained glass windows designed by Pre-Raphaelite artist Sir Edward Burne-Jones and made by William Morris & Co between 1880 and 1903.

Leave by the path to the left of the Church front and turn right into Trinity Row. Across the car park is Holy Trinity Church Hall, originally Holy Trinity School, opened in 1840. The building, along with the boundary wall to car park, is Grade II listed.

Just beyond the far car park wall is the school extension, built in 1887. The school was originally for boys only. Girls were accommodated at the next site we come to. The school was closed in 1977 and relocated to another part of town (Critchill).

Turning away from the car park, left up Gould's Ground, on the left you will find Fountain House, Grade II listed, built in 1818 and which soon became Holy Trinity Vicarage, until 1940. A girl's school and church room were added in 1854 and demolished about 1970.*

At the end of Gould's Ground you have the choice of a short diversion to the Dissenters' Cemetery (approx. 5 minutes each way) - 9, or continuing on the main circuit - 10.

9 *For the Dissenters' Cemetery, at the end of Gould's Ground turn right into Vallis Road and immediately cross the road with care. Continue for some way until you reach the cemetery on your right.*

The Dissenter's Cemetery includes a Romanesque Chapel and Superintendent's Lodge (Gate House) built in 1851. These and the piers, walls and railings are Grade II listed. A cemetery for the Free Churches of the town had been proposed in July 1850, and subscriptions were taken up. The plan was supported not only by the Nonconformist congregations, but by the Anglican parishioners. The cemetery is open at all times, but the Chapel is only opened once a year.

Retrace your steps back along Vallis Road and cross carefully opposite Gould's Ground.

10 *With Gould's Ground behind you, turn left along Vallis Road and left again into Orchard Street. A short distance down on the left is the current (since 1940) Holy Trinity Vicarage, with another view of the previous one (Fountain House) just beyond. Return to Vallis Road and turn left and left again into Naish's Street. A short distance down on the left is Ebenezer Chapel.*

Ebenezer Chapel, now flats, was home to the Particular Baptists and built in 1835.

Retrace your steps for a short distance and turn left into Baker Street. Cross Selwood Road and continue ahead and around to the right. Turn left into Vallis Way. Cross Castle Street and bear left into Catherine Street. Just past the Sun Inn on your right you will come to Badcox Lane Baptist Chapel.

11 Badcox Lane Baptist Chapel and Rectory was built originally in 1711 on what is now Catherine Street. Initially, it was an unusual trapezoidal building, due to a restricted site. It was replaced by the current building with a fine Doric portico in 1813/14. A beautiful set of art nouveau stained glass windows were installed in 1894 and can be glimpsed from just beyond the building. Grade II listed, the building is now flats.

Continue down Catherine Street. Passing a small car park on the right – to the right of which are the remains of the Temperance Hall, built in 1875. Continue down into Catherine Hill.

12 St. Catherine's Chapel was thought to be part of the Manor House of St. Catherine, which embraced the Grade II listed 15, 14 and 13 Catherine Hill (now the shops Mary Kilvert, Frome Hardware and Solsken). It was known to exist in 1279 and was closed in 1548. It was licensed in 1672 for use by Baptists (but see 13). This site was also considered to be known as the Old Nunnery (but see 14).

Opposite number 13 is the Zion United Reformed Church entrance screen. The entrance has the dates of the first church, 1810 and the screen, 1893. The screen, gates and railings are Grade II listed. The associated Grade II listed hexagonal Sunday School of 1875 can be seen on the left down the now-private path. This was the site of the original Zion Chapel and was used by a group of Moravians in the 1770s until the 1810 church was built.

A little further down on the same side is 23 Catherine Hill.

13 23 Catherine Hill, now Poot Emporium, was said to be used by Baptists prior to Sheppards Barton and may be an alternative site for St. Catherine's Chapel (see points 12 & 14).

Carry on down Catherine Hill and turn left into Stony Street. Continue ahead into the Market Place, turn left into Cork Street, over the pedestrian crossing. Turn left towards Westway Cinema.

14 The Westway Cinema has been thought to be an alternative site for St. Catherine's Chapel (see points 12 & 13).

Return to the Market Place, turn left and continue down the road to cross over the bridge, turn left into Bridge Street and left into Justice Lane back to the starting point at the Discover Frome Information point.

FINISH

Walk compiled by Steve Ehrlicher

Further reading:

The Buildings of Frome – R. D. Goodall

The Book of Frome – M. McGarvie

The Making of Frome – Peter Belham

Frome Society for Local Studies Yearbooks.

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