

The Chairman's A – Z of Somerset Churches

Trust Chairman, Axel Palmer, has set himself an objective of visiting a range of churches and chapels across Somerset to compile his own A – Z! This time:

The Bishop. The King. St Michael and ... er .. Highland Cattle! And a Dragon!

Now that the new website is up and running and 'in glorious technicolour', I have no excuse for not recording my walks!

With all good fortune, this will be the last such walk because I am confident I will shortly be moving to a Tax Haven!

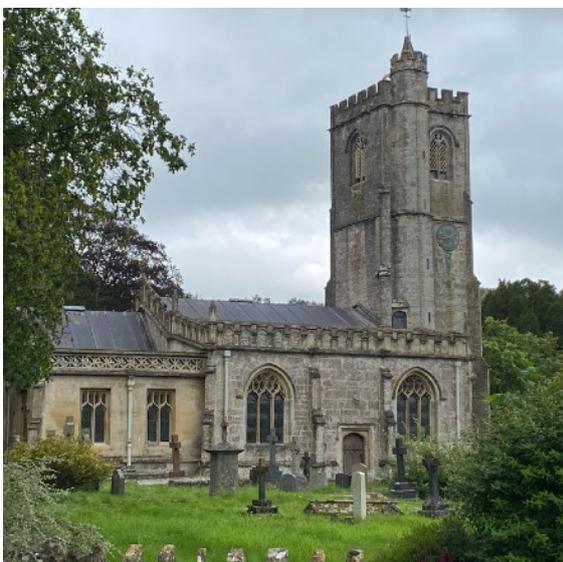
Today, the Antiques Roadshow comes to Wells and Mrs Palmer is taking along a couple of family heirloom oil paintings. I confidently expect we will have to leave the country for warmer climes!

My latest trip commenced at the Bishop's Palace (which needs no introduction), along a little lane which afforded a great view of Wells Cathedral with, rather surprisingly, an effigy of a Highland Cow in the foreground - turning round, to face the real version!

Then a climb up to King's Castle, an Iron-age Hill-fort (a scheduled ancient Monument) (to the uninitiated - me - a wood!). Then along the top of the hill, along tracks and, eventually, a lane to Dinder.

[Editor's note: when in doubt or need text, turn to Pevsner!]

Pevsner says that 'Dinder is as pretty as any village in N Somerset' and who am I to disagree? Pevsner noted the 'Good Oak Lychgate' to St Michael's which he thought was probably built on the site of a Norman chapel and he comments: 'Norman arch moulding re-set over one S window with beads and fine dragons' head terminations (with very doggy features).'



When is a Dragon not a Dragon? When it's a Worm! The Dinder Dragon or Dinder Worm, or The Dragon of Worminster Sleight

Oddly enough, Pevsner is silent on the matter of the Dragon (apart from his actionable comments re 'doggy features').

The story goes that the people of Dinder, Dulcote and North Wootton were plagued by a dragon. "It began with eating the children, and it seemed it was only when it started eating the stock they got really worried."

According to that unimpeachable academic source (BBC website), the dragon was slaughtered by Bishop Jocelyn of Wells, around 1240. We are told that the story is well documented in ancient papers, held at Eton College after being retrieved from Somerset monasteries. "It says that Bishop Jocelyn went out and slew a dragon that was ravaging the countryside - very simple, matter-of-fact, as if it was a day-to-day chore in the bishop's diary.

"In those days bishops did have a small garrison of their own, but he fought this one single-handed, so there are no actual witnesses.

"But the legend has come down that the event has to be celebrated every 50 years to prevent the dragon from coming back to life.



The Worminster Dragon commemorative plaque outside the Bishop's Palace.

That's letter D then!

(With luck, this is the last A-Z! News from Antiques Roadshow urgently awaited!)