

Holidays with a religious connection

Salisbury Diocese (including Dorset and Wiltshire)



Shaftesbury Abbey was founded by Alfred the Great in 888 - he installed his daughter Aethelgifu as the first abbess. It was closed by Thomas Cromwell in 1539 as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries and is now ruins. Alas the attraction was closed when we visited Shaftesbury on January 2nd, a bank holiday.

Day 3 – Shaftesbury

On the third day of our visit we travelled to **Shaftesbury in Dorset**. It's a town steeped in history – the nunnery, **Shaftesbury Abbey** was founded by Alfred the Great in 888 and became one of the wealthiest in England before its dissolution in 1539. On arrival we took a walk along **Abbey Walk**, the wonderful promenade that overlooks one of England's most glorious landscapes. It's great to have such a feature in the middle of the town.



Abbey Walk, Shaftesbury; right - War Memorial in Abbey Walk.





The famous Gold Hill, Shaftesbury. It was featured in the 1973 Hovis Bread advertisement, which featured a boy struggling to deliver a loaf to the top of the steep hill, then freewheeling back down again to Dvorak's 'New World' Symphony No 9. It also appears in the 1967 film version of Thomas Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd. The film starred Julie Christie, Alan Bates, Terence Stamp and Peter Finch, and was directed by John Schlesinger. Shaftesbury was the 'Shaston' in Hardy's novels.



The Hovis ad is commemorated outside the Town Hall, at the top of Gold Hill - visitors can place a donation in the box for the upkeep of the cobbled surface of the hill.

After walking down **Gold Hill**, we explored the lower part of the town on our way to the church of **St James**.



The church of St James, Shaftesbury.



The Town Hall, built at the top of Gold Hill in Shaftesbury.

On walking back to the centre, we saw the **Georgian Town Hall**, built in 1827 at the top of the hill.

Gold Hill

An artist's impression of a busy market day at the top of Gold Hill before the current Town Hall was built in 1827.

The main features still in place are Shaftesbury Abbey precinct wall on the left and the medieval church of Saint Peter on the right together with the Sun and Moon Inn just below the church.

The six sheep in a pen in the front of the illustration represent a tenant's right to keep these animals - as bestowed on all cottages on Gold Hill. This permission remains in place to the present day!

King Alfred founded Shaftesbury Abbey in AD888 - it was the first nunnery not connected to a male community and became the model for all other Royal nunneries. His daughter, Aethelgifu, was the first Abbess.

Other items in the picture include the Poultry Cross, a Fish Stall and an Apple Tree Seller occupying regular sites in this thriving market place.

Artist: Janet Swiss (who also provided a complementary mural of the same period in Swans Yard, off the High Street).

Shaftesbury Civic Society
Shaftesbury and District
Historical Society



An artist's impression of how Gold Hill might have looked before the Town Hall was built in 1827.

At this point we retired to the **King Alfred's Kitchen** in the town centre for lunch.



King Alfred's Kitchen in Shaftesbury.

Our next port of call was the 15th century **Parish Church of St Peter's**, a relatively small church in Shaftesbury town centre, adjacent to the Town Hall at the top of Gold Hill. It is the only one surviving of 12 medieval churches that once existed in Shaftesbury town centre. The church has been extensively re-ordered - they abandoned fixed pews some time ago in favour of a more flexible, intimate layout – the congregation worships in a semi-circle.



St Peter's, Shaftesbury.



The interior of St Peter's Shaftesbury. Chairs are arranged in a semi-circle around the chancel.



The altar at St Peter's, Shaftesbury, still decorated for the Christmas season. We visited on January 2nd 2017.

Martin and Magda Jones

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Sources of information:

Shaftesbury Abbey:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaftesbury_Abbey

Hovis advert:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mq59ykPnAE>

Dvorak New World Symphony

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_\(Dvořák](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_(Dvořák))

Gold Hill Shaftesbury

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_Hill,_Shaftesbury

Shaftesbury:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaftesbury>