

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



WALK THIS PILGRIMS' WAY - FROM THE NORTH

Starting from the railway station, pause at a medieval pilgrims' hospital before heading across the centre of the town and its market place and going on to the site of the shrine of St Edmund.

FROM	To	OS MAP	MILES/KM
Railway station	Abbey Gardens	211	1.25/2

This route starts at Bury St Edmunds Railway Station IP32 6AD. If you are travelling by car (limited free on road parking nearby, or use town centre car parks) or on foot, pick up the route at number 2.

As you follow this pilgrim route, you are encouraged to stop and pause from time to time to think about the landscape through which you are walking. Think about the people who live and work there now and those who have done so over the years.



1. Turn left out of the station building, following the pavement and stop at the main road. Cross the main road at the zebra crossing.
2. Continue to the left a few metres until you reach the ruins of St Saviour's Hospital.



PAUSE – The Hospital of St Saviour was one of several medieval hospitals which offered care and hospitality to visiting pilgrims. Founded in 1184 it now stands as a ruin, and is the place where Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Uncle of Henry VI, died (possibly murdered) in 1447.

3. Retrace your steps, cross the main road, and proceed past the station, keeping on the same side of the road as the station, until you reach a mini roundabout.
4. Cross over this busy main road and continue straight ahead up Ipswich Street.
5. Follow the road as it bears right and becomes St John's Street.



PAUSE –St John's Church is Victorian, so wouldn't have been seen by medieval pilgrims. But you may wish to stop and pray. <https://www.northburychurches.org.uk/st-johns>



Image: Graham Portlock

6. Continue along St John's Street, well known for its independent shops, and at the top of the street, go straight ahead into the pedestrianized area (Cornhill).



PAUSE – This is the site of the market, which is still held on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Think about the farming community in Suffolk, who work in all weathers to provide food for us to eat.



Image: Andy Abbott

7. Continue along the right hand pavement (past WH Smith, Boots), crossing Woolhall Street, until you reach the top of Guildhall Street.
8. Continue along Guildhall Street until you reach the left hand turning, Churchgate Street.

THE PILGRIMS' WAY



From the top of Churchgate Street, look down towards the Norman Tower. This is the same view which would have greeted pilgrims visiting the town in medieval times (without the cars and the phone box). The Norman Tower's original name was the Church Gate, as it was the main point of entry into the great Abbey church.

Pilgrims would have gathered on the spot where you are standing before taking the final few steps to the Abbey. It is believed that a small chapel once stood on this site.



PAUSE – Consider all the pilgrims who have stood on this spot. Why did they make the journey to Bury St Edmunds? Why have you done so today?

When you are ready, proceed down Churchgate Street.

At the end, cross over Crown Street and stand in front of the gate.

You will notice that the floor levels are different. At the time of the Abbey this area was prone to flooding and there would have been a moat around the Abbey. Over the centuries the ground level has risen to its present height.

Rule of St Benedict – Chapter 66

“At the door of the monastery, place a sensible person who knows how to take a message and deliver a reply and whose wisdom keeps them from roaming about. This porter will need a room near the entrance so that visitors will always find someone to answer them.”

At the Church Gate, visitors and pilgrims would have had to state their business to the Porter.

The Norman Tower has always housed bells. Today there are 13 bells, which are rung for services in the neighbouring St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

Turn right and head to St Mary's Church, a little further up Crown Street.



PAUSE – Inside St Mary's is a St Edmund window and the tomb of Mary Tudor, who was once buried in the Abbey <http://www.wearechurch.net/>

Retrace your steps for a few metres, then cross through the Churchyard via the metal gate and narrow path (flat access available by turning left beyond St Mary's Church, then left again into the Churchyard along the tarmac road).

Stop at the ruined building in the middle of the Churchyard. This is the Charnel House, where bones of the deceased were put.



PAUSE – Surrounded by so many graves, stop to think about the lives of the people who are buried here.

Take the path which goes diagonally across the Churchyard towards the Norman Tower. When you reach the main road, turn right and visit the Cathedral (entrance on Angel Hill).



PAUSE – The Cathedral is open for prayer and reflection. Follow in the footsteps of countless pilgrims and step inside. <https://stedscathedral.org/>

Leave the Cathedral and continue into the Abbey Gardens via the Pilgrims' Herb Garden (tucked away behind the Cathedral office, to the left of the Cathedral on Angel Hill).

You might want to explore the Abbey Gardens now.

Finally make your way to the site of the shrine. Head across the gardens towards the tall pillars (to the right) and stand amongst the ruins of the Abbey.

This was the end of the journey for medieval pilgrims. A holy place, a place of prayer.



PAUSE – consider all the pilgrims who have visited before you, before you set off for home again.



(map below)

