

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



WALK THIS PILGRIMS' WAY - FROM THE SOUTH

Starting from the southern edge of the town, follow what might have been the route of medieval pilgrims to reach the site of the shrine of St Edmund.

FROM	To	OS MAP	MILES/KM
Hardwick Heath	Abbey Gardens	211	1.5/2.5

This route starts at Hardwick Heath IP33 2QZ. There is a car park here (fee applicable). You can also reach here by bus (any bus which goes to West Suffolk Hospital).

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.



PAUSE - As you set off, you will see the grounds and buildings of the West Suffolk Hospital. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have been indebted to the staff who work for the NHS and in the caring profession, who have been alongside people in need.

The monks of the Abbey were the first physicians in the town, using herbs to heal.

1. Start by crossing Hardwick Lane and walking to the left. Take the tarmac path on your right (almost opposite the Hospital site entrance). Follow this straight down, crossing Barons Road, until you reach the Water Meadows (you are following the St Edmund Way. Look out for the signs).
2. Fork right, just after you have crossed a stream, and continue until you reach Cullum Road. (NB this is a very busy road. Take care).

3. Pick up the path opposite and bear left at the path junction, crossing a stream. Continue until you reach Friars Lane.
4. At the top of Friars Lane, turn left.



PAUSE – take time out at the Catholic Parish Church of St Edmund, King and Martyr, with its panels depicting the story of St Edmund, made in the 1960s.

<https://www.stedmundkm.org.uk/>



Image: John Saunders

5. On leaving the church, cross Westgate Street and continue to the left until you reach Guildhall Street.
6. Continue along Guildhall Street until you reach the right hand turning, Churchgate Street.



PAUSE – stand outside the Guildhall, which dates from 12th century and has had a fascinating history including its 20th century role as a World War 2 Operations Room <https://burystedmundsguildhall.org.uk/> You will find it just a few steps further along Guildhall Street. Consider those responsible for governing our town and those who play apart in keeping its citizens safe, such as the police and fire and rescue service.



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 stop at the entrance to the Cathedral (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)



Abbey Gardens

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

Abbey Ruins

Guildhall

Norman Tower

Churchgate St

Charnel House

St Mary's Church

St Edmund's Church

Water Meadows

Hardwick Heath Car Park