

# **The Paston Way**

**22 Mile trail visitng the histric churches from North**

**Walsham to Cromer**

The Paston Way is a 22 mile trail stretching from North Walsham to Cromer, discovering the area's beautiful medieval churches along the way. Each church has its own hidden history and one was even moved brick by brick from a cliff top to save it from the sea.

In travelling from church to church, the trail ambles down quiet lanes, through picturesque towns and villages, across vast arable fields, disused railway lines, quiet grazing pastures and cliffs and beaches with views of the North Sea. Keep a look out for seals on the stretches of the beach walk too. To visit all 14 of the Paston Way's fine churches, follow the waymarked church links off of the Paston Way. If following all church links the trail will cover a total of 29.5 miles.

The Paston Way takes its name from the Paston family who during the Medieval and Tudor periods were the dominant and wealthy landowners and merchants in the area through which much of the trail passes. The Paston family in turn had taken their name from the small village of Paston on the North East Norfolk coast. The family were important during the 16th and 17th century but financial troubles meant the families' fortune was lost in the first half of the 18th century.

The family are immortalised by the famous 'Paston Letters' which were correspondence between the family from 1422 to 1509. The portrait the letters paint, is of a colourful and dangerous age which has maintained their continuing interest to historians.

The following towns and villages are all well worth exploring along the trail.

Paston photo



# North Walsham

The name Walsham comes from the Old English for 'Wael's home-stead'.

The Paston Way begins in North Walsham market place next to St Nicholas Church, which dates from the 14th Century and is distinguished by its partially ruined tower,

which once soared to 147 feet. The 14th Century porch is a beautifully decorative carving with many ornate figures. The church contains a 15th Century painted font cover which is topped by a pelican. A very notable feature inside is the ornate tomb of Sir William Paston, who founded nearby Paston School, now Paston Sixth Form College, in 1606. The monument shows Sir William full length in armour, comfortably propped up on his elbow. A meticulous man, he commissioned this excellent monument himself two years before he died. The school was later attended by Horatio Nelson and his brother William.

North Walsham Market Place has an impressive octagonal Market Cross with a three-tiered dome erected in 1602 to replace an earlier structure that was destroyed by fire in 1600. It was fitted with its chiming clock in 1899, which was taken from Worstead Hall in 1787. North Walsham the village grew into a town after the arrival of Flemish weavers in the 14th century. By 1379 sixty eight families were engaged in making Walsham cloth. The town was hit by a disastrous fire in 1600, which destroyed 118 houses in the town and, it was claimed, cost £20,000. As a result, the majority of buildings date from after this time.

it is worth visiting North Walsham memorial park built after WW2 on the site of the Oaks, a great house with a large estate including pleasure gardens, orchards, a hot house and an orangery. The house was demolished in the 1930s. The park has beech hedged ornamental enclosure and cherry tree lined walk down to the war memorial.

# Edingthorpe

Follow the trail out of North Walsham along the disused Norfolk and Suffolk joint railway line through Pigney's Wood Nature Reserve, an area of mixed woodland and wet meadows and home to many species of bird and other wildlife. North Norfolk Community Woodland Trust that has been planted with over 40 species of trees over the past 20 years. The Knapton Cutting, part of the same railway line is also a designated butterfly reserve and is home to 19 different species.

This section of the trail also crosses the disused North Walsham and Dilham Canal, now much narrower and shallower than it once was, it was Norfolk's only canal and the only one ever built specifically for wherries. This important artificial waterway linked North Walsham to the River Ant at Dilham. The canal was completed in 1826 at a cost of £32,000. Once completed, the system allowed goods to travel to from Antingham, via the River Bure, to Great Yarmouth and back again. The canal was ten miles long, dug by hand by a labour force of about a hundred men, and lined with clay. It soon became clear that the volume of trade was too small to be profitable. The increased popularity of the railways (the Midland and Great Northern, and the Norfolk and Suffolk Railway and improved roads meant that, in a short period of time, transport became cheaper and more efficient. The river and canal were also to play an important role in both World Wars, being incorporated into a series of anti-invasion defence stop lines along which pillboxes and other reinforced structures were built at tactical strong-points.

As you reach Edingthorpe, you will encounter the picturesque 14th century church of All Saint's. at the the west of the parish standing on a low hill and surrounded by trees. This church has a round tower with an octagonal top dating to the 12th or 13th century, but the bottom part of which probably dates back to Saxon times. The war poet Siegfried Sassoon used to spend childhood holidays at the Old Rectory in the village in the 1930's and wrote about the timelessness of the church in his autobiography. According to local legend, the small holes in the screen were made by Cromwell's men during the Civil War.







# Knapton

Situated just inland from the coastal parishes of Paston and Mundelsey, its name comes from the Old English for 'Cnapa's settlement or farm'.

The medieval church of St Peter and St Paul dates from the 14th & 15th Century and later restored in 1882. Dating from 1504 the impressive double hammerbeam roof is decorated with 138 carved and painted wooden angels.

Also note the flint with dramatic domed cover, inscribed with a Greek palindrome: NIYON ANOMHMA MH MONAN OYIN which loosely translated reads 'wash though, not only my face but my transgression'.

The offset west tower is topped with a weather vane based on a drawing by the Norfolk artist John Sell Cotman.

# Paston

The village of Paston has long associations with the wealthy landowning family of the same name. The name comes from the Old English for 'enclosure by the small pools'.

The village's thatched 14th-century church of St Margaret's contains several family tombs of the Paston family who lived at nearby Paston Hall. Despite the church being next to the hall, the family spent the most money on Broomholm Priory near Bacton and were buried there, so St Margaret's remained relatively plain. When the church was rebuilt, wall-paintings covered the inside, and in the 1920s some of them were rediscovered. On the north wall is the top half of a big St Christopher, and further along two parts of a Three Living and Three Dead. The painted skeletons are reminders of mortality and were very popular in the years after the Black Death.

Up in the chancel are several large memorials to the Pastons. The older ones are believed to have been brought here from Broomholm when the monastery was closed by Henry VIII. On the north side, and dominating the chancel are two memorials by Nicholas Stone, the leading 17th century sculptor, one featuring the life-size Dame Katherine Paston, who died in 1628 and her widower Sir Edmund Paston died 1632.

Members of the family were responsible for the famous Paston Letters, a large collection of historically valuable correspondence written in the 15th century. This same wealthy family also built the enormous thatched barn in the village, the famous Paston Great Barn and has two inscriptions attributing it to Sir William Paston in 1581. This 16th-century thatched flint barn, which has brick buttresses and a magnificent hammerbeam roof, is both a scheduled listed building and a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest because it is home to a rare maternity roost of barbastelle bats, one of only three in Britain and the only one to use a building to roost.

Standing resplendent by the road in the north of the parish is Stow Hill Windmill. A famous landmark of the north Norfolk landscape, this tarred brick tower mill was built in 1827. It was converted to a house in 1930, then damaged by lightning in 1955. After many years of work it has now been fully restored, and with its timber cap, sails and fantail, is an impressive monument.

On the northern coast is Mundesley Holiday Camp. Opened in 1933, this was the first purpose-built fully catered holiday camp in Norfolk, and only the second in Britain. During World War Two, the camp and its surroundings were used as a military training camp.



# Bacton

Continuing your journey from Paston through you will reach the coastal village of Bacton, its name originating from the Old English 'Bacca's Enclosure'. Pass by the 14th century church of St Andrew with its fine 15th century west tower the stoup dating to the Norman period. The Ten Commandments are beautifully painted on the eastern wall like ancient illuminated manuscripts. As at Trimingham, Sidestrand and Mundesley, the church serves as a landmark for seafarers.

The other medieval church in the parish, St Clement's was in the coastal east part and was ruined by the sea in 1386. Its foundations were then washed away in 1760. A portion of the churchyard remains, however, and human remains have occasionally turned up during works.

The most important is Broomholm or Bromholm Priory. Founded in 1113 and dedicated to St Andrew. It became very famous in the 13th century as possessing a relic of the Holy Cross, and was visited on several occasions by Henry III. In WW2 the north transept of Bromholm Priory was reinforced with concrete and converted to a strongpoint, which can still be seen.

In World War Two the threat of invasion was far more serious and the defensive measures taken in 1940 were correspondingly massive. Defences were built to form a coastal 'crust', and then in successive 'stop lines' inland, along rivers and other natural features. Being a coastal parish, a large number of pillboxes and other defence structures were built, and quite a few survive today. Modern day fortifications now stand around Bacton gas terminal, one of the largest industrial complexes in East Anglia and the area is frequented by police patrols which are not an uncommon sight.

# Mundesley

Mundesley between Overstrand and Happisburgh on the north east coast is a popular seaside resort with a fine sandy beach. Its name comes from the Old English for Mundel's clearing.

All saint's Church dates from the Norman period with 14th and 15th features. It was almost completely rebuilt between 1899 and 1914 after standing in ruins for hundreds of years. Every remnant still in situ or discovered in the churchyard appears to have been re-used with imagination and affection.

The Norfolk and Suffolk Joint Railway ran through the parish. This was a late 19th and early 20th century railway, from East Runton to North Walsham, via Cromer, Overstrand, Trimingham, Mundesley, Paston and Knapton. The Cromer to Mundesley section was closed in 1953, with the other sections closed in 1964. The village once had its own railway station but this closed in 1964.

World War Two saw the construction of a huge network of anti-invasion structures along the Norfolk coast. These included pillboxes, tank traps, coastal defences. To the west of the parish stands a Royal Observer Corps underground monitoring post, opened in 1961 and closed in 1991. It was designed to monitor fallout in the event of a nuclear attack.

The village itself is well served by local pubs and shops in and around its small High Street. make it an ideal place to live or to visit yet, somehow, it has not lost its old-world charm with thatched roofs, stone walls and many quaint and charming cottages. Mundesley sits in a dip in the cliffs and from the clifftops there are spectacular views across the whole of the village and right across to Happisburgh lighthouse in the other direction.



## Gimingham

southwest of Cromer, is the modern long linear village of Gimingham. Mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. The name Gimingham comes from the old English meaning 'homestead of the family of follower's of Gymi or Gymma'.

Here you will find All Saints' church, set in a lovely graveyard and dating from 1300, the elegant Tudor windows with their clear glass and exceptionally intricate and delicate patterns on the framing, allow light to stream into the simple white coloured interior. Set in a land of churches which are giants in size, All Saints is a fairly modest church but welcoming to strangers and passers-by.

Gimingham is also the site of an 18th century water mill, Gimingham Mill, which is mentioned in the Domesday Book and stood in the centre of the village until 1980 when it was demolished following a fire. In 1805 a workhouse was built in the south of the parish to serve nine parishes, before being converted into fourteen cottages in 1850. It has since been demolished. Mundesley Hospital was built in the east of the parish in 1898/1899. It was the first large tuberculosis sanatorium to be constructed in Britain.

## Trunch

Following the church link to trunch, this pretty village is home to the Church of St Botolph, famous for its splendid oak font canopy. The canopy is carved with flowers, birds and animals, one of which is a pig wearing a bishop's mitre. The hammer-beam roof is adorned with angels and the hinged seats in the chancel also reveal outstanding carvings of winged animals, angels and a devil. Ink-well holes and carved initials in the old choir stalls are from around 1700 when the chancel was used as a school room.

Outside, the church is largely 15th century which succeeds an older saxon building which stood on the same site. The 95ft tower can also be seen for miles around. St Botolph was an English abbot and saint. He is the patron saint of travellers and the various aspects of farming.

In the centre of Trunch is a lovely collection of cottages and the more modern Crown Inn. Also of interest is a rare World War One pillbox, situated on the Trunch Road.



## Trimingham

The name 'Trimingham' may refer to the Old English words for enclosure of Trymma's people. Trimingham is home to the church of St John the Baptist's Head, which has a short, heavily buttressed tower and dates from 1300. A life-sized alabaster carving of St John the Baptist's head used to be on display here in medieval times and the church would have once been an important place of pilgrimage.

RAF Trimingham which has been in use since its existence as a beacon in the medieval period. During World War Two it became an RAF site in 1941. Between Overstrand and Trimingham is a mysterious tree-shaded pond that is known locally as 'The Shrieking Pit'. Although this name is normally associated with the flooded pits of ancient ironworking site, here a local legend tells of a young woman called Esmeralda who is said to have drowned here as the result of a tragic love tryst.



## Southrepps

Southrepps just 1200m away from the North Sea at the nearest point. The western edge of the parish is cut by the Cromer Line of the East Norfolk Railway which was began in 1867 to connect Norwich to Cromer. The land is largely used for agricultural use and the name is derived from the term 'south repps', the word 'repps' stemming from the Old English word for 'strip'.

Follow the church link from the main trail and you will reach Southrepps Church of St James which boasts a remarkable tower, built in 1448 and 114ft high. Much restoration took place in the 19th Century but St James remains a spacious, light-filled church. This massive church rides the gentle hills to the south of Cromer.. It must have been one of the biggest churches in the county and it rises almost fifty metres, a beacon over Poppyland. Vernon Arms pub on Church Street.

## Northrepps

The name 'Northrepps' is derived from the Old English word 'repel', meaning strips of land in a fen that can be tilled.

Follow the church link to St Mary the Virgin. Check out the crowned 'M's over the west door. The great tower of Northrepps may not quite match those of its near neighbours at Cromer and Southrepps, but it is still a spectacular sight rising above the folding valleys of North East Norfolk. A more familiar Norfolk name is associated with this church, as the Gurney family lived at Northrepps Hall.

If you continue north along the spur to church street you could stop at Foundry arms before continuing your journey back along the Paston Way.

# Sidestrand

Sidestrand is a small parish with a long coastline of dramatic cliffs facing the North Sea. The name 'Sidestrand' is thought to derive from the Old English for wide shore.

The old church of St Michael's used to stand on the cliff edge. Due to the threat of erosion the church was partially demolished, leaving just its tower in place as a landmark on the edge of the cliff. The solitary round tower finally succumbed to the sea in 1916. In 1881, a new church of the same name was built further inland to exactly the same design using material from the earlier church. To visit, follow the church link at Sidestrand. The east window depicts Christ walking on the water, relevant given that this church stands as a memory of its predecessor lost to the great North Sea. Above, a brass candelabra adorned with poppies has a quote from Romeo and Juliet: My bounty is as boundless as the sea, My love as deep.

It was in the poppy filled Sidestrand church that Victorian journalist Clement Scott dreamed up the name poppylands, which was later used to popularise the North East Norfolk Coast and famously used in the Great Eastern Railway posters

# Overstrand

Overstrand, east of Cromer, is home to the local legend of the Black Shuck, a shaggy black dog with red blazing eyes that is said to bring bad luck or even death if his glance is met with yours.

Following the church link to you will reach the medieval St Martin's Church. This church replaced the earlier St Peter's which was washed away in 1399. Church rock lying about a quarter of a mile inland is said to be the old steeple of St Peter's church and past generations have claimed to hear its bells ringing to warn of bad weather. St Martin's was in ruins by the 18th century before being restored between 1911 and 1914. In the south wall of the tower is a small oven for baking wafers, its flue coming out near the top. There is a tablet to Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, the philanthropist and anti-slavery campaigner, who died in 1854.

The coming of the railway to North Norfolk made the area popular with holiday visitors. Overstrand was once a crab fishing centre but it became a very fashionable resort for wealthy Londoners at the end of the 19th century when this part of the Norfolk coast was celebrated as 'Poppyland' by the writer Clement Scott. Overstrand became known as 'the village of millionaires' and there are several grand buildings in the village that date from this period. Both Overstrand Hall and The Pleasaunce in the village were designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. Another notable building is Sea Marge at the east end of Overstrand in High Street. This large half timbered Edwardian house, now a hotel, was built between 1908 and 1912 by the German born financier Sir Otto Speyer, who was apparently later stripped of his title and deported as a spy.

The landscape of the parish changed dramatically during World War Two with the construction of a huge network of anti-invasion structures along the Norfolk coast. These included pillboxes, training areas, weapons pits, slit trenches and gun emplacements.

## Cromer

As you approach the end of the Paston Way you will reach the popular seaside resort and 'Walkers Are Welcome' town of Cromer. The town has long been associated with crab fishing and Cromer crabs are still highly regarded. The name Cromer is recorded from the 13th century, meaning 'lake frequented by crows'.

During the medieval period Cromer became a thriving coastal town; its wealth reflected in the magnificent church of St Peter and St Paul that dominates the town centre. The 160ft church tower is the tallest in the county. Some of those who lost their lives at sea, as well as several lifeboat men are commemorated in Cromer cemetery, where some of the headstones are decorated with carvings of ships and the Cromer lifeboat.

Cromer continued to flourish, and during the 18th and 19th centuries it became popular as a seaside resort and immortalised in Clement Scott's poppyland posters. In 'Emma', published in 1816, Jane Austen mentions Cromer as 'the best of all the sea-bathing places. A fine open sea... and very pure air'. Cromer Pier was built in 1900 and remains one of the main attractions for visitors. The pier houses both the offshore lifeboat station and the end-of-the-pier Pavilion Theatre.

The elegant 19th-century Hotel de Paris on the promenade just above the pier was designed by Norwich architect, George Skipper. Further along the promenade to the east of the pier is the RNLB Henry Blogg Museum, which documents the thrilling history of the Cromer Lifeboat and the town's most famous coxswain, Henry Blogg. Next to the church is Cromer Museum which includes a fossil display, a cosy Victorian fisherman's cottage and a nationally important collection of photographs by pioneering North Norfolk photographer Olive Edis.

During World War Two, Cromer was heavily protected from the threat of German invasion and a large number of pillboxes, gun emplacements, searchlight batteries, and air raid shelters were built on the seafront, as well as the Cromer Coastal Battery. Several pillboxes on the seafront were disguised as ice cream stands!