

WALKS AND WANDERS

A 3.5 mile walk round Stowmarket, Suffolk with 12+ points of local history

*For the full information on all the local history you will visit on this walk, watch the video at <https://walksandwanders.com/2024/02/08/stowmarket-history-walk-2/> or view on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/dxKKMi8XkYM>

Route map and instructions



The walk begins outside the food museum [S] on the map. The museum is next to Asda in Stowmarket.

Head across the car park to Iliffe Way, following it to the junction with Finborough Road and turn left towards the Recreation Ground. Use the crossing to cross over into the Recreation Ground keeping on the left path that leads to the Memorial Gates.

[1] Step through the gates, (being careful of the main road) to view the names on the war memorial panels. At the end of the WW2 panel on the right gate, you will find mention of Mrs Rhoda Farrow – the only female and only civilian named on the memorial. Mrs Farrow was killed when a German Bomber bombed the town centre, destroying the Congregational Church and Mrs Farrows house. The full story of this tragedy is told in the video.

Go across the Recreation Ground towards the junction of Recreation Road and Violet Hill Road. Turning left onto Violet Hill, follow the road down past the Health Centre, until you reach the Cemetery Gates.

Cross the road into the Old Cemetery, following the path to a little roundabout.

[2] On this grass Circle you will find a memorial stone with the names of the victims of the Guncotton Explosion, who died on 11 August 1871, when Stowmarket was devastated by a massive explosion at the Gun Cotton Works. (We will visit the site of the explosion later in the walk). More info in the video.

Walk down the hill to the bottom of the cemetery to emerge on Bury Road. Use the crossing to cross over and turn right onto Bury Road towards Lidl Supermarket.

Pass the supermarket and the Used Car Dealer. A little further along, just pass the Oil Tanker Yard, you will see a little track on your left called Pound Lane.

[3] Before heading down Pound Lane, notice the cream-coloured house on the corner. 18 Bury Road was a pub – The Bell Inn - from 1836 until it closed in 1919.

Head down Pound Lane. The former name of this track was Sickhouse Lane.

[4] As you reach the end of the track, you will see an old cottage on your left. This was the building used as an infectious disease hospital, and then a general cottage hospital. Turn right onto Hamilton Way until the junction with Crown Street.

Cross Crown Street and head down Bond Street straight ahead. Follow the street all the way down to Stowupland Street, turn left and cross over to see the River Gipping.

[5] This area used to be a busy hub with barges arriving and leaving with malt and other goods. The bargemen were served by several local pubs in this area. Most have now disappeared but the Pickerel Inn, on the opposite side of the road, survives to this day.

Go onto the river path and follow the riverbank to emerge on Station Road. Carefully cross the road and head down the steps to continue on the river path. Pass under the bridge at Navigation Approach. Continue down the river until the next large bridge and once you have passed under it, look back at the artwork on the concrete panels of the bridge.

[6] The panels on the bridge depict past industries in the town: cloth production, basket weaving, the iron foundry, and lawn mowers.

Continue down the riverbank until you reach the entrance of the PPG paint factory. Don't be put off by all the fences and security measures! Head through the opening in the fence across the painted zebra crossing markings (this is a public right of way).

Continue along the river path, noticing some coloured panels on the wall to your left.

[7] Just after the dark blue panel, you will find an information panel on the wall, which explains the history of the Gun Cotton Works and the devastation explosion. Along the bottom of this panel, you will find the names of those who were killed in the explosion. This panel is close to where the explosions occurred.

Retrace your steps a short way, heading back the way you came, until you reach the blue security turnstile on your right. Just opposite the blue workers gate is a small bridge crossing the river. Turn left over this bridge, and again, do not fear all the fences and security signs.

On the other side of this bridge, you will find another zebra crossing which indicates the route of the footpath. Cross this and follow the path round to the left outside the fence.

You will come to another old footbridge on the right. Cross this to emerge on Bridge Street. Follow this to Gipping Way, turning slightly right to cross at the little traffic island, and through the gap in the fence onto the continuation of Bridge Street.

[8] A little way along Bridge Street, take the right fork onto Lime Tree Place. This area was known as "California" in 1856, and the name appeared on old maps, which was a reference to the California gold rush and the rapid expansion of this part of Stowmarket during the same period. The video shows that this area had its own bakery, post office and separate shops back in the day. When you get to number 22 Lime Tree Place look up to see a Green King Brewery sign. This building was formerly The Unicorn Pub.

[9] Follow the road to the end at its junction with Ipswich Road and turn right towards the town centre. Set back from the road, on the opposite side, is Red Gables. Now home to several wellbeing Charities, this building was formerly the home of Octavius Seman, the founder of Seman's builders who build many of the houses in the town. Later on, it was the home of the Prentice Family who owned the Gun Cotton Works.

[10] You will soon pass the Regal Theatre and Cinema. Before this was built, this plat along with its car park, was known as Dukes meadow and was the location of the annual fairground and other community events.

[11] Passing down the main street you will come to the United Reformed Church on your left. This was the location of the old Congregational Church that was bombed during WW2, killing Mrs Rhoda Farrow, who lived behind the church. This was the lady who's name we saw on the memorial gates at the start of this walk.

Continue a little way, until the British Heart Foundation Shop, and turn left at the shop, up Marriots Walk. A little way up here, turn right on to a triangle grass area.

[12] This grass triangle is known as the Camping Land. This has nothing to do with sleeping under canvas, but refers to an ancient game called 'Camping' which was a cross between football and rugby, but much more violent and with very few rules. Several people died during Camping, which was a popular sport in East Anglia, usually played after Church on Sundays. The pitch would originally the size of a football pitch but most of it has now been reclaimed by Abbotts Hall behind the tall brick wall opposite.

Continue along the side of the camping land towards Crowe Street. Here you will see the large gates of Abbotts Hall on you left. To your right are two old cottages which were the Dairy Cottages for Abbotts Hall and the is an information board on the fence.

Continue ahead up the slope at the side of the Food Museum, to return to your starting point near Asda.

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