



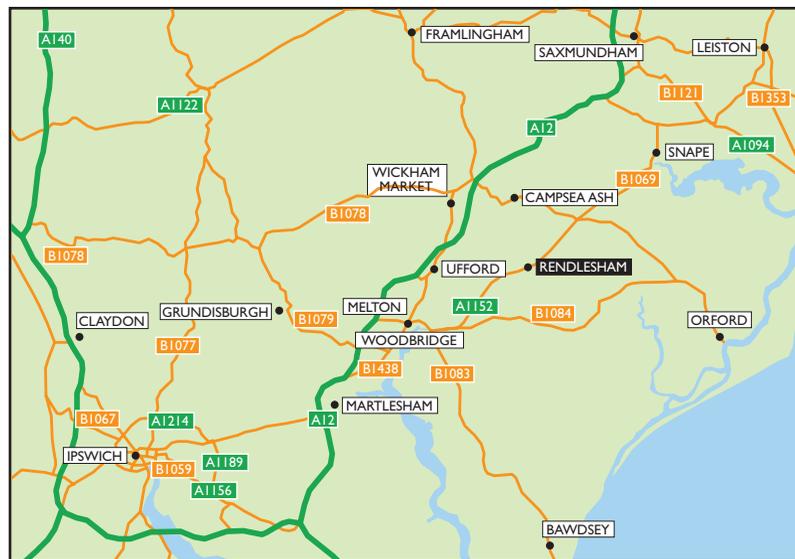
# Treasured Suffolk

# Rendlesham and the Deben Valley

## Hidden Anglo-Saxons



## Location



## Directions

Rendlesham is near the River Deben in south-east Suffolk, approximately 9km north-east of Woodbridge, 6km north-east of Melton and 7km south-east of Wickham Market. The walk starts at the train station in Campsea Ashe, known as Wickham Market train station (IP13 0PT). Alternatively, park at Melton Riverside Car Park (IP12 2PA) and catch the train up to Wickham Market train station to start your walk.

## Public Transport

Melton and Wickham Market train stations are on the East Suffolk Line which is served from Ipswich and Lowestoft. Visit [eastsuffolklines.co.uk](http://eastsuffolklines.co.uk) or [suffolkonboard.com](http://suffolkonboard.com) to plan your journey.

Produced by Suffolk County Council for the Rendlesham Revealed project.



# Welcome

The now tranquil Deben valley was once at the heart of the East Anglian Anglo-Saxon Kingdom and holds many hidden archaeological secrets. This area of Suffolk is famous for the princely ship burial discovered at Sutton Hoo in 1939, but more recently a long-lost royal settlement has been found at Rendlesham.



This royal settlement, or vicus regius, is first mentioned in the 8th century by the venerable Bede, a Northumbrian monk, in his book *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. He writes that it was here that Aethelwold, King of the East Angles, sponsored the baptism of Swithelm, King of the East Saxons, sometime between AD 655 and 663.

Archaeological investigations at Rendlesham identified the site of the royal settlement in 2008 and has since revealed that it was active for almost 300 years, from the 5th to 8th centuries. Covering 50 hectares, the size of 70 football pitches, it is the largest and wealthiest settlement of its time known in England.

To find out more about the ongoing investigations at Rendlesham visit [heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham](http://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham)

These walks take you through the Deben Valley across open fields, through meadows and into woodland. There are two options: a circular walk to Rendlesham, or a long distance station to station walk following a section of the waymarked East Suffolk Lines Walk.

## Please follow the Countryside Code:

- ✓ Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors.
- ✓ Leave gates and property as you would find them and follow paths.
- ✓ Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home.
- ✓ Keep dogs under effective control.
- ✓ Plan ahead and be prepared.
- ✓ Follow advice and local signs.



# In The Footsteps of Kings

**DISTANCE:** 7 miles (11km)

**DURATION:** 3-4 hours

**TERRAIN:** Some road walking, field edge and cross field paths. When crossing train tracks please take extra care and Stop. Look. Listen!

From Wickham Market train station ❶ turn left towards Mill Lane. Follow the lane turning left onto Ullswater Road. Continue along a hedge-lined path with a metal fence and railway track on your left until you reach an open field. Continue next to the railway cutting, keep left beside the field before crossing the field on the footpath to a gap in the hedge on the other side ❷. Cross the road and go through the gate and continue ahead through the trees and ferns; keep an eye out for Buzzards gliding above.

At Loudham Hall Road go over the stile and follow the road to the right. You will soon glimpse a 16th century farmhouse and 15th century watermill, which are on the site of a 12th century Priory

❸.

## CAMPSEA ASHE PRIORY

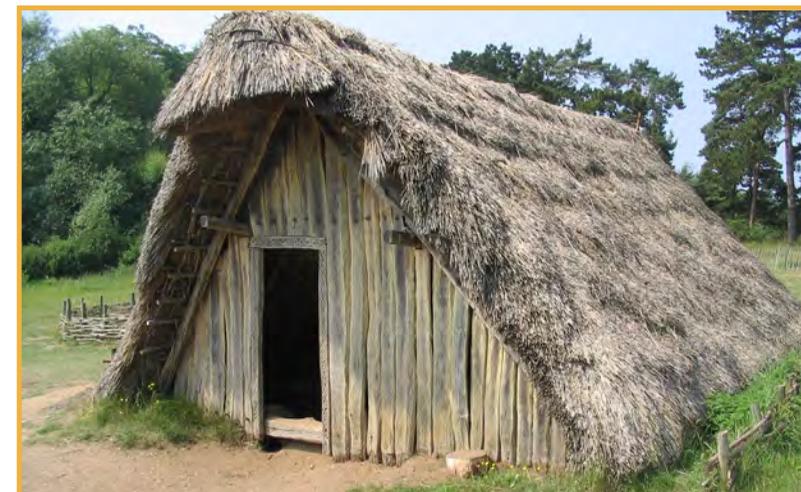
An Augustinian Priory was founded here in AD 1195 for 21 nuns by Theobald de Valoines. It was later inherited by the family of Ufford, Earls of Suffolk c.1295, before it was suppressed in 1536. The site is now occupied by a farmhouse, watermill and large barn; the remains of Campsea Ashe Priory, such as some of the stonework, was reused in these buildings. Excavations in the 1970s revealed some of the original floor plan of the 12th century Priory and some burials including a Purbeck marble tomb. The watermill can be seen from the road with its timber frame and white painted weather boarding.

Follow the road for approx. 1km until you reach a gap in the hedge with some steps on your left that take you up onto a field ❹. Keep right and follow the edge of the field until you reach a crossroad of paths ❺.

Continue ahead along the grassy path, going over a stile and taking great care when crossing the rail level crossing. At the stile on the other side of the tracks, you can see Rendlesham Church in the distance. Continue ahead with the hedge on your right.

A short way down the slope stop a moment to see the view of the Deben Valley ❻. Beyond the treeline is a white farmhouse. To the right of the house is a big field.

This is where the earliest evidence of the Anglo-Saxon royal settlement was discovered.



A reconstructed Anglo-Saxon hut at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village and Museum.

## EARLY ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT

This area is part of the extensive Anglo-Saxon royal settlement at Rendlesham. Archaeological investigation here found evidence of many small huts, used perhaps as workshops. All that remains of these wooden buildings now are the pit-like sunken floors or cellars. In one of these a complete handmade bowl and a bronze brooch dating to the 5th and 6th centuries were found. Larger timber halls, which provided living space, would have also been built here.



Excavating the cellar of an Anglo-Saxon hut.

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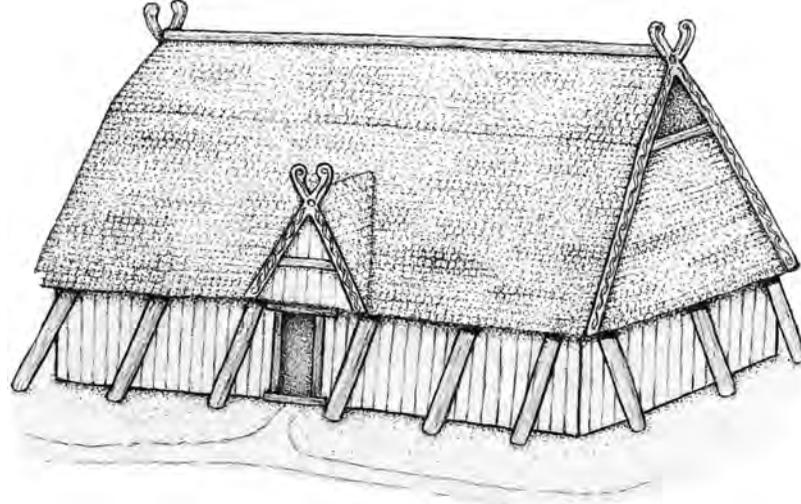
At the bottom of the slope turn left and then right onto the grass path into the trees following the stream. Look out for dragonflies along the way until you reach a bridge. You are now crossing the River Deben.

## RIVER DEBEN

The River Deben flows for nearly 40km from Debenham to the North Sea, of which 12km is a tidal estuary from Bromeswell to Felixstowe Ferry. The Deben Estuary is protected nationally as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its wildlife and coastal landscape and is within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Today the estuary is relatively narrow and sheltered but in Anglo-Saxon times the river would have been a major transport route. It is difficult to know how far ships and boats could navigate up the Deben – were Anglo-Saxon people sailing up to Rendlesham, or unloading goods further downstream and transporting them over land?

Cross the bridge and walk diagonally across the field to the left-hand corner, go through the gate. Turn right through another gate. Continue ahead, you'll soon see the top of the church tower peeking over the field on your left **7**. You have reached the southern part of the Anglo-Saxon royal settlement. In this field on your left, there is evidence of a large timber hall and the activities that took place in and around it.



## ANGLO-SAXON RESIDENCE

When the royal settlement was at its peak between the late 6th and the early 8th centuries a large hall was built on this promontory, dominating the surrounding landscape. This is where East Anglian kings would have stayed when in residence, lavishly feasting, administering justice, and collecting dues and tribute. It would have been here that the feasting and ceremonies accompanying King Swithelm's baptism were held.

There would have been a tent village around the hall to accommodate the King's retainers, servants and slaves.

Fourteen hundred years ago, you would have

seen aristocrats, warriors, farmers and craftspeople in this now tranquil field, and traders in luxuries from the Continent and Mediterranean. Archaeologists have found many of the objects they made, owned and traded, including gold coins from the Continent, gold-and-garnet jewellery and weapon fittings, and metal vessels and Byzantine coinage from the eastern Mediterranean.

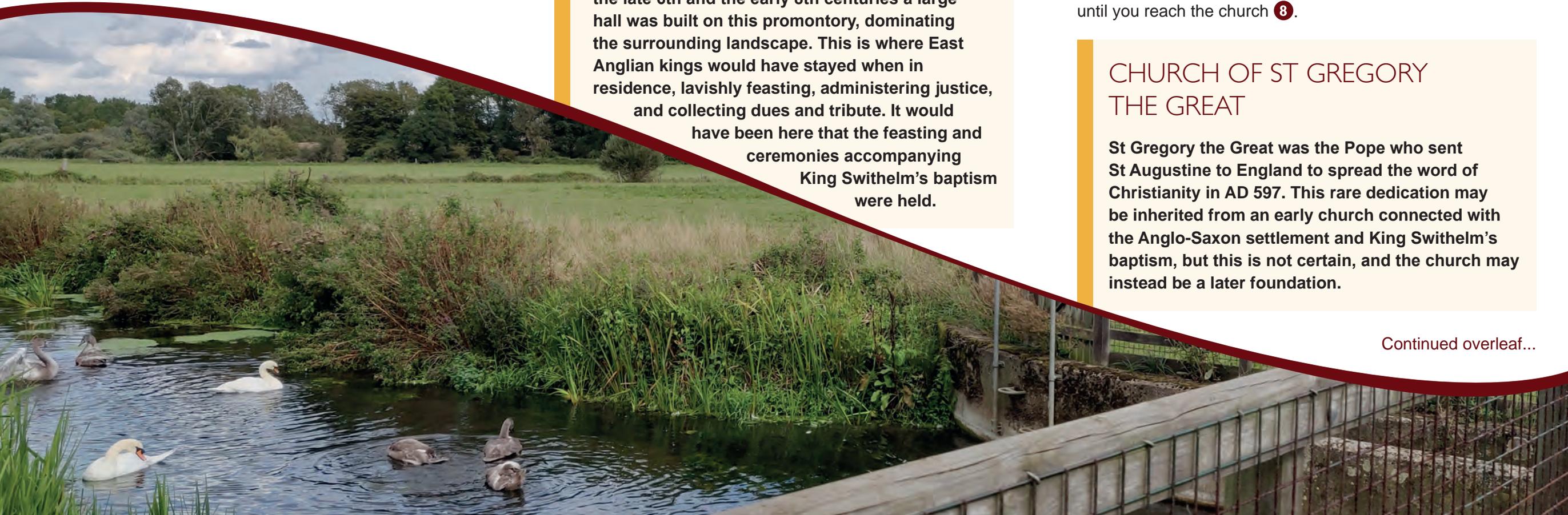


Continue ahead. Go around to the left of the cottage and through a gate. After the second gate turn left onto the track until you reach the church **8**.

## CHURCH OF ST GREGORY THE GREAT

St Gregory the Great was the Pope who sent St Augustine to England to spread the word of Christianity in AD 597. This rare dedication may be inherited from an early church connected with the Anglo-Saxon settlement and King Swithelm's baptism, but this is not certain, and the church may instead be a later foundation.

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The church standing here today was built in the 14th century. It has a square west tower with diagonal stepped buttresses, a porch with a chamber above and rectilinear windows which were restored in the 19th century. Inside is a traditional 15th century octagonal font with lions and evangelist symbols and the tomb and effigy of the Rector John Chaperson, who died in 1349.

Retrace your steps to the crossroad of paths ⑤ and the gap in the hedge ④. Turn right and return along the road until you reach a wooden bridge on your left. Go over the bridge and follow the path; you can see Loudham Decoy Pond in the woods on your right-hand side.

## LOUDHAM DECOY POND

Decoy ponds are artificially created to catch wildfowl, such as ducks, for food or for their feathers. This tradition began in the medieval period and was particularly popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is thought that Loudham Decoy Pond was originally created by the Augustinian Priory in the 13th century, by damming the River Deben to deliberately flood the area to create a fishing lake.

Follow the path ahead through the gate – watch out for the cows grazing in the fields. Pass through the final gate and turn right into an ancient woodland, which has the remains of traditional woodland management with oak coppice stools, as well as hazel and field maple trees. Continue along the path until you reach the road. Turn right and then immediately left onto the field ②.

Cross the field and follow the route back to Wickham Market train station ①.



# Through the Deben Valley

**DISTANCE:** 9 miles (14.5km)

**DURATION:** 4-4.5 hours

**TERRAIN:** Some road walking, field edge and cross field paths. When crossing train tracks please take extra care and Stop. Look. Listen!

Follow the first walk 'In The Footsteps of Kings' to the Church of St Gregory the Great in Rendlesham ⑧. Return to the crossroad of paths ⑤ and then turn left onto the track. The walk from here to Melton Station is approximately 3.5 miles / 6km (1.5-2 hours). A short way along you will reach the impressive gates of Loudham Hall ⑨.

## LOUDHAM HALL

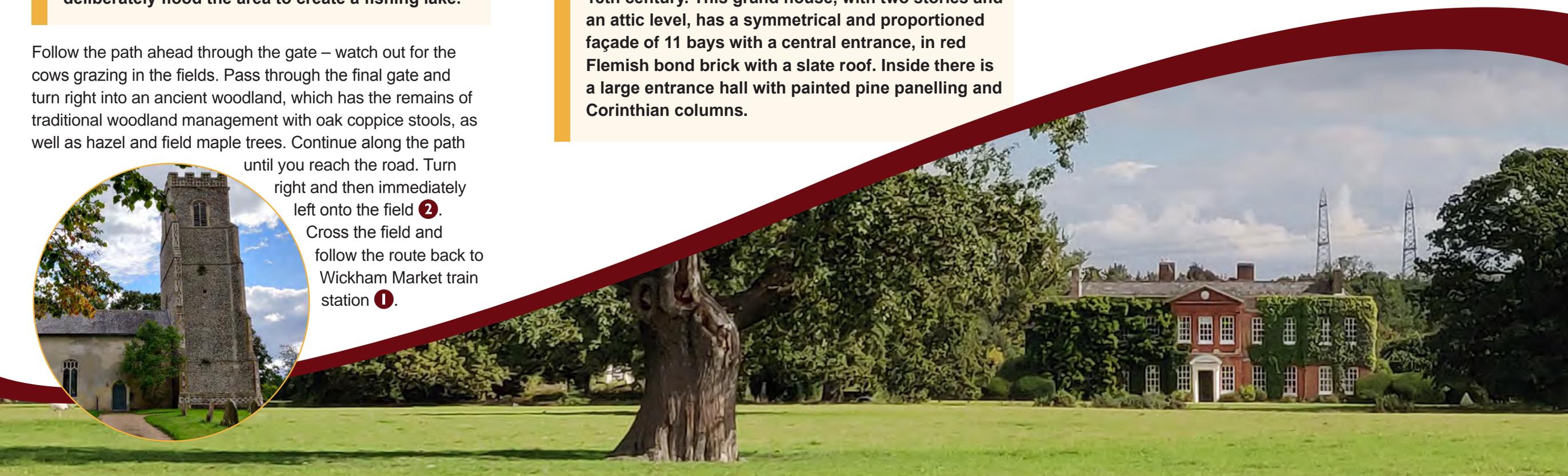
Originally built for the Loudham family in the 16th century, Loudham Hall was greatly altered in the late 18th century. This grand house, with two stories and an attic level, has a symmetrical and proportioned façade of 11 bays with a central entrance, in red Flemish bond brick with a slate roof. Inside there is a large entrance hall with painted pine panelling and Corinthian columns.

At the end of the track, follow the footpath across the field and then continue ahead onto a grass path with the hedge on your right then continue across the fields. Look out for Kestrels hovering above the hedges.

Turn left onto the road until you reach a gate on your left. Go through the gate and cross the field to the right-hand corner. Continue ahead a few meters, keep right, and go through the small gate which leads to St Mary's Church ⑩. Pass through the churchyard to the other side.

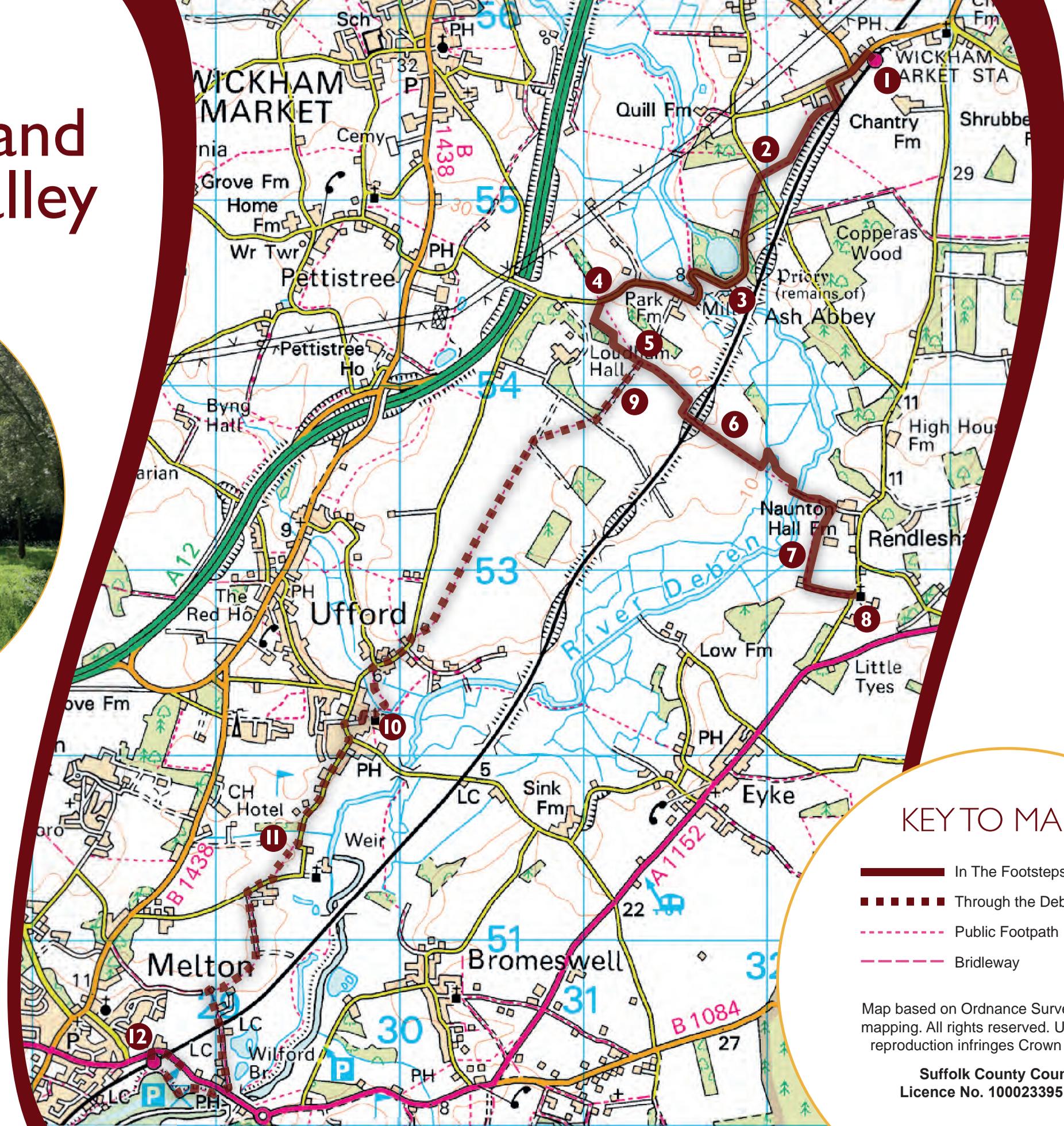
Continue up Church Lane, which is lined with beautiful 16th-18th century timber framed and brick houses. At the top of Church Lane turn left then right onto Lower Road. After a little while, on the bend of the road, you will see a gate ahead ⑪. Go through the gate and continue across the golf course to the other side. You may glimpse Melton's old church of St Andrew on the left standing proudly among the trees.

Turn right onto the road. Turn left at Decoy Farm and follow the path keeping right. At the fork go left and continue ahead, taking great care crossing the rail level crossing. Cross the main road carefully and then keep right to follow the riverside walk until you reach the steps on your right. Follow the path into Riverside Car Park. If returning to Melton train station ⑫, go on to the gate, turn left and follow the road over the level crossing.



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Hidden Anglo-Saxons



## KEY TO MAP

- In The Footsteps of Kings
- Through the Deben Valley
- Public Footpath
- Bridleway

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## Discover More:

Visit the Suffolk Heritage Explorer at [heritage.suffolk.gov.uk](https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk) for more information about the archaeology and history of Suffolk.

Discover many more walks and great days out in the countryside at [discoversuffolk.org.uk](https://discoversuffolk.org.uk)

