



King's Lynn u3a History Trails



Almshouses

Almshouses were established from the **10th century** in Britain and were charitable housing for the elderly, the poor or those unable to work. They were also called **hospitals** or **bede-houses** and the residents were **bedesmen** or **bedeswomen**, who were obliged to pray for the soul of the donor of the charity. Bede-houses were an extension of the church and usually incorporated a chantry chapel.

The Reformation swept away this system of social help with the **Abolition of Chantry Acts in 1545 and 1547** and the closure of the monasteries. People unable to work were forced to beg or starve. During the reign of **Henry VIII** there were severe penalties for able bodied men who begged. For a first offence the man was “vigorously whipped at the cart’s tail”, for a second offence “his ear was slit or bored with a hot iron and a third time “suffered death as a felon”.

In **King’s Lynn** the **town Assembly** was very concerned at the level of destitution in their town. They decided to copy what the civic authorities did in London and struck hundreds of small tin plaques with the town’s credentials. When these were given to bedesmen it entitled them to solicit for alms. Also there were wealthy merchants, who before the Reformation would have left money to the church, decided to build and endow almshouses. In **1601 the Elizabethan Act of Poor Relief** began the process of replacing church charity with a compulsory land tax levied at Parish level. Those unable to work were cared for in almshouses as society began to take over poor relief.

Most of the almshouses you will see on this circular walk are **nineteenth century** and at the end of that century there were eleven in the town.

The walk takes you past the town centre almshouses. It takes about one to one and a half hours depending how long you stop to look and read. Please be considerate of the occupants’ privacy as you walk round.

Start at Baker Lane car park and if possible park in the right hand car park.

1. the Burkitt Almshouses. These 12 almshouses were built by **William Burkitt**, a local corn merchant and Mayor of King’s Lynn, in **1909** in memory of his uncle of the same name. At the top corner of the car park set into a brick wall there is a metal gate marked private which enables you to see the garden. Walk back to the entrance of the car park and turn left into Queen Street which will take you past the front of the Almshouses. The building has a red brick 2 storey central gatehouse topped with polygonal angle turrets. It has single storey wings. The windows are mullioned and the façade is crenellated. It is a Grade II listed building and may be Gothic Revival or Eclectic in style.



On **Queen Street** continue left, pass the **Town Hall**, with its iconic, decorative stonework. Opposite is **King's Lynn Minster**. Cross over and walk past the entrance to the Minster until you reach a junction of three lanes, take the left hand lane - **Priory Lane** which leads to **Church Street** where you turn right.

At the end of Church Street cross over the large roundabout into **Bridge Street** continuing onto **All Saints Street** past modern flats to your left. Walk through a barrier glimpsing **All Saints Church** to your left. Enter **South Lynn Plain** and ahead is **Valingers Road** where there were almshouses built in **1605** using stone from the **Whitefriars monastery**.

Thomas Valinger (1575 – 1611) who built the almshouses was Town Clerk. He also provided a small endowment in his will for housing 4 poor men. At that time the street was called **Finkel Row** and the name was changed to commemorate Thomas Valinger's gift to the town.

Bear right into **Friars Street** where you will find.....

2. the Elsden Almshouses. You are in the parish of South Lynn where Edmund Elsdon bequeathed £6000 to his wife and then to the Lynn Charity Trustees to build and endow 8 almshouses for 8 poor men who were 60 years of age or older. They were built in **1865** after the death of Mrs Elsdon.



Past the Elsdon Almshouses opposite a primary school turn left **onto Checker Street** where you will find.....

3. The **Weslyan Almshouses** that could have existed before **1780** and were possibly linked with the **'Artillery Company of the Brotherhood of Benevolence'**. During an induction ceremony for a **'Master Hammerlast'** into the order the chaplain suggested that the new member might, in his last will and testament, leave something for the order, to enable them to build chimneys for each of the 'raw, cold, uncomfortable apartments of the Bedehouses in Lynn'.

In **1829 Benjamin Smith** built and endowed the 'Wesley Almshouses' that were named after his friend John Wesley, to house 8 poor women at a cost of £1000. Note the terracotta plaque dated 1920.



At the end of **Checker Street** you reach **The London Porterhouse** a tiny real ale pub with a charming courtyard garden. Turn left and cross **London Road** at the Pelican crossing. Turn right past the statue of **Frederick Savage** then bear left and enter **Guanock Place** continuing on to **Guanock Terrace**. Next bear right onto **Goodwins Road**, passing the **Lord Napier pub** on your right. At the T junction turn right and continue down **Goodwins Road** which bears left at the mini roundabout. As you walk along, on the left the first almshouses you come to are the....

4. Backham Almshouses 67 – 85 Goodwins Road Five almshouses were built in **1901** by bequest of **Oscar Backham** and his mother **Caroline**. Oscar Backham was a printer based in King's Lynn who died in **1888**. He left his entire estate to his mother stipulating 'she make provision in her will that her estate be devoted to creating almshouses in the parish of South Lynn'. The land was purchased for £300 and the Almshouses, which were for married couples, were completed in **1901** at a cost of £1000. Caroline did not live to see this. Our u3a researcher was invited to visit one of the almshouses and was told that they are available for single people or couples.



Further along **Goodwins Road** and on the left are the

5. John Sugars almshouses 83 -93 Goodwins Road . These six almshouses, built in **1887**, were financed by a builder John Sugars and were originally to house six widows over the age of 55. John Sugars went on to be a ship owner and in **1854** was elected to the **Workhouse Board of Guardians**. He also financed the Sugars window in **All Saints church, South Lynn**. This church is well worth finding as it is the oldest in the town and has a closed cell where an anchorite (religious recluse) would have lived.



Continue past the almshouses, turn left at the cross-roads and walk up **Extons Road**.

At the end of this short road, with some attractive terraced houses on the right-hand side, turn right over the **Gaywood River** you reach **Broad Walk** on your left going through the park. This was constructed in **1753** and the alternating chestnut and lime trees that line the avenue were paid for by a wealthy town resident, **Charles Turner**. The walk was designed for the wealthier classes to use and find respite from the noise, smells, grime and bustle of the town centre. There was a gate keeper at each end to keep out the lower classes and undesirables

This area of parkland called **The Walks** because it had wide tree lined avenues is an area of national importance and in 1996 it was designated a Grade II listed landscape. It is also the only surviving town walk in Norfolk.

Continue walking along The Broad Walk, through the park until you reach **London Road**. Immediately on your left are the.....

6. Framingham Almshouses These were originally situated in Broad Street and were partially built by **John Halcott in 1674** using a grant of £2,799 7s 6d but sadly he died before completion. **Henry Framingham** completed the work in **1704**, endowing £1000 prior to his death. Henry Framingham came from a poor background and worked in a 'bake house' where, by hard work and good fortune, he became very wealthy. He was **mayor** in **1690** and again in **1709** and he was also **High Sheriff for Norfolk**.

Framingham Hospital/Almshouses was rebuilt on the London Road site in **1848** and consisted of twelve separate residences, built around a quadrangle. Over the past 25 years the residences have been upgraded to include a separate bedroom, living-room, bathroom and kitchen – all with central heating.

The name Framingham Hospital was changed to Framingham Almshouses because it caused the residents much trouble when people called for medical treatment



Now turn right and find the pedestrian crossing on **London Road**. Cross over London Road and bearing left pass the iconic **Town Library**, a Grade II listed building financed by the American philanthropist **Andrew Carnegie in 1904**. Passing the library turn right into **Millfleet** and on the other side of the road there is a very small Jewish cemetery in use from **1811 to 1846**. road there is a very small Jewish cemetery in use from **1811 to 1846**.

At the end of **Millfleet** cross over into **Nelson Street** and on the left you will pass **Devil's Alley** which leads to the river. (If you wish walk up Devils Alley and turn right along the river bank where there are several restaurants). Continuing along **Nelson St.** past the **Minster** cross the road to **Queen Street** and very soon you see the iconic **Burkitt Almshouses** on your right reaching the **Baker Lane** car park, where you started the walk.

There are two more almshouses you may be interested in seeing but they are a little beyond the town centre for this walk.

7. The first is **Gaywood Hospital (almshouses)** on **Gaywood Road** near **King Edward VII Academy**. Built in the **13th century** they are the oldest foundation in the town but were destroyed during the siege of Lynn during the Civil War. They were re-built in **1649** and restored in **1904** with further restoration and modernisation in **1965**. The almshouses are arranged around a courtyard and are set back from the busy road.



Leaving King's Lynn heading north on **John Kennedy Road**, turn right at the Chiropractic clinic into **Loke Road**, and **Sir Lewis Street** is 1st on the left where we find

8. Marion Almshouses in the **North End of the town**, They are interesting in that they were built to provide homes for seamen and fishermen in **1928**. The almshouses were founded by **J. Bowker** a maltster and housed 8 old mariners and their wives. Although this was planned, the depression during the **1930s** only allowed 3 houses to be built. They were named after the founder's wife Marion and were still in use in **1988**.



Further afield is **Castle Rising** which has the

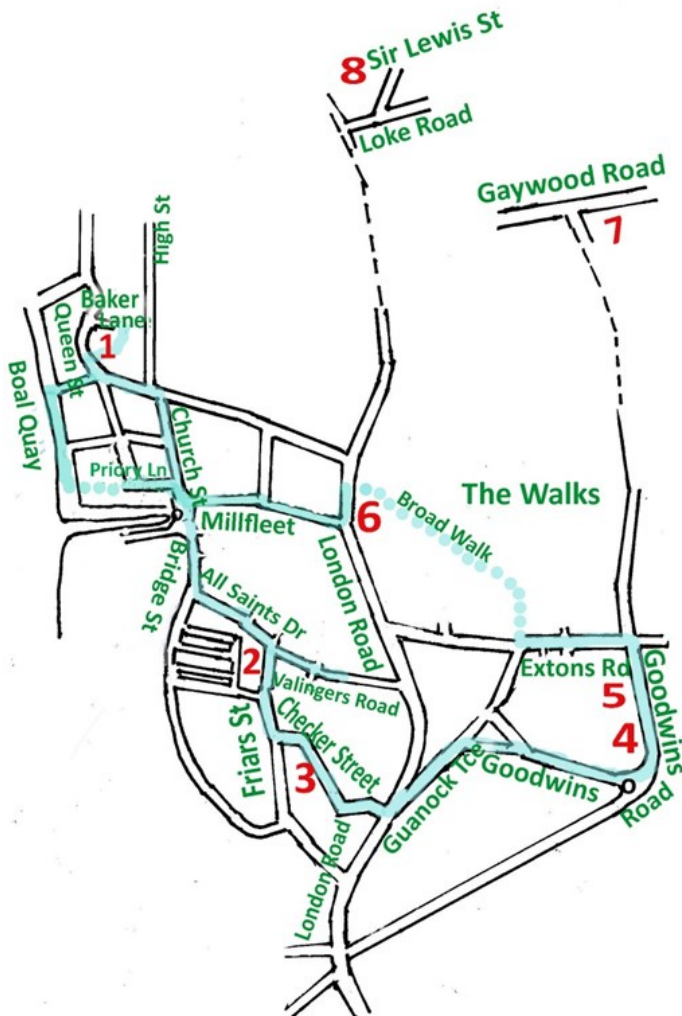
Hospital of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, founded by **Henry**

Howard, Earl of Northampton between **1609** and **1614** at a cost of £451 14s and 2 ½d. He endowed a charity to provide homes for 12 single women from Castle Rising village who were at least 56 years old. They had to be 'of honest life and conversation, religious, grave and discrete, able to read. No common beggar, harlot, scold, drunkard or haunter of taverns'. They had to attend chapel daily and the church of St Lawrence every Sunday and Holy Days dressed in their distinctive black hats and blue (later red) gowns. They were to say prayers for the founder, whose badge they wore.

The almshouses were built of Norfolk red brick and is a Grade I listed building. There is also a **12th century castle** to visit which has one of the largest, best preserved and most lavishly decorated keeps in England. It passed into the hands of the Howard family in **1544** and is still held by them.



Trail Map



References: The History of King's Lynn – Henry Hillen History of King's Lynn Volume 2, folders of newspaper cuttings held at the town Library, Civic Society, Castle Rising History Society.

King's Lynn u3a History Trails

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www.kingslynnu3a.org.uk

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