



# King's Lynn u3a History Trails



Friaries

# Introduction

From **13th to 16th centuries Bishops Lynn**, as it was then called, was a wealthy merchant town and, as was the case in such times, the economy, trade and industry were interwoven between Church and State.

Eventually under **Henry VIII** the State gained supremacy, hence **Bishops' Lynn** became **King's Lynn**.

However, the Church left a rich spiritual and economic legacy in Lynn. It boasted a number of Friaries. Their presence would have made an impression upon the local landscape and to some extent would have determined the shape of the town. This is evidenced by well-known street names: -

**Carmelite Terrace,  
Whitefriars Terrace,  
Priory Lane,  
Greyfriars,  
Blackfriars St,  
Austin St.**

Using these as our guide, **our trail** begins:



**Boal Quay** car park usually has plenty of spaces.

## 1. Carmelites (Whitefriars) Arch

At the end of **Carmelite (Whitefriars) Terrace** is where our **trail** begins, at all that remains of Carmelite Friary (also known as St Mary's Priory),



**The Friary was founded in 1269** by several notable Benefactors.

In **1526 Princess Mary, sister of Henry VIII** stayed here.

In **1536** The Prior and 10 brethren signed the surrender of their convent.

In **1544 a John Eyre** purchased it and it was afterwards sold to the corporation. Watch out for John Eyre, he seems to be a bit of an opportunist.

**Friar Alleyn**, an erudite **White Friar**, wrote one of the earliest biographies in the English language. It was dictated to him by a certain **Margery Kempe** a local woman, mystic and visionary.

From **Whitefriars Arch**, our trail leads down **Bridge St** and **Church St** to: **Priory Lane** and.....

## 2. St Margaret's Minster Church



**The Benedictine (Black Monks) of St Margaret** Priory/Friary The Priory of St Margaret of Antioch, St Mary, Magdalene and all the Virgin Saints was founded as a cell of the Cathedral Priory of Norwich, by **Herbert Losinga** around **1101**.

With only 4 monks in residence, it was the smallest of the religious houses in Lynn but it was the richest.

The Church was enlarged several times. What is now the chancel, remained the Priory Church and the nave became the Parish Church.

### **3. The Claustral buildings**

Were to the south of the Church extending along **Church Street** to **Priory Lane**, where the original Gateway still stands.



The **Chapter house** was on the south of the chancel. It was a six-sided building with seating for 15 and was entered from the south transept.

The **Cloister** was where the graveyard now is. Some of the domestic buildings are in Priory Lane where visitors/pilgrims would have been made welcome. They are well maintained and exist as private dwellings to this day. Pilgrims still visit King's Lynn on their Way to Walsingham and take their rest and refreshment in the Churches of the town.

The **Monastery/Friary** flourished. The friars owned **Gaywood Mill**, a saltworks (a very lucrative occupation!) . They built **St Nicholas** 'and **St James** ' chapels.

They owned **Saturday Market** (The Market of the Monks) It seems they were affluent and highly respected as they were granted a fair in their honour on St Margaret's Day (20th July).

By the **15th century**, St Margaret's was very much the town Church. The burghers of the town invested in chantries and monuments.

By **1510** most of the work of the church was being carried out by the Chantry priests living in. . . . .

**4. Thoresby College** , another King’s Lynn landmark and worthy of a visit, down **College Lane** off the **South Quay**.

Edmund of Norwich was the last Prior before the **Dissolution in 1537**, when the property was granted to the Dean and Chapter of Norwich where, in a sense, it still remains, as a Minster Church with its own Suffragan Bishop in the Anglican Diocese of Norwich.

From the **Saturday Market Place** make your way down **St James Street** to the site of.....



**5. Greyfriars Priory**

where, carefully engraved, is the layout of the impressive buildings, where the monks lived, worked, worshipped and entertained.

**The Franciscans** were in England before the death of St Francis (1226) and within 40 years they were here in Lynn.

**Greyfriars** was founded here about **1264** by Thomas Feltham who provided land near what is now **The Millfleet**. It appears that fresh water in and around the marshy area was in short supply after the draining of the river Lin so in **1314**, during the reign of Edward II, the Friars acquired a patent for bringing water to their house from a spring in North Runcton some 10 mile away!

In **1365** they enlarged their domain and built what is now known as **“The Greyfriar’s Tower”** one of only 3 such medieval towers that remain in the UK.



This one featured as a finalist on the BBC programme “Restoration” in a bid for funding to restore and maintain it. Though the bid was not successful, moneys were forthcoming from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Tower is now safely recovered and a joy to behold. To this day it provides a valuable landmark for sailors in the peaceful setting of the Tower garden. The Tower and the gardens are always open to the public and diligently maintained by the local council who own the site.

The **friary surrendered** to the **King's Commission** in **1539** when there was a guardian and 9 friars in residence. It comes as no surprise to note that the aforementioned **John Eyre** soon added the property to his portfolio!

Now browse further down **St James Street** into **Tower Street** and **Blackfriars street** here we find the site of.....

## **6. The Blackfriars Friary**

**The Dominicans** came to England in **1222** , **50 years** later at the end of the reign of **Henry III** the Blackfriars were settled in King's Lynn, the friary was founded by **Thomas Gedney**," a person of great consideration in those parts".

The friary was granted the rights of access to a spring in Middleton, a nearby village. Though the area of Bishops Lynn, as it was then called, was surrounded by marshland, rivers and sea, it was all salt water and not palatable for drinking.

So again, we read of friars being granted access to the precious commodity of fresh water!

Learned, preaching friars became highly regarded and their influence grew but along with the other friaries in the town in **1539** they surrendered to the king's men. The prior and 11 friars were in residence at the time.

The only visible remain of this eminent friary is the.....



**Stone Preaching Cross,**  
currently housed in **King's Lynn Museum.**

The museum itself is probably on or near the site of the original Blackfriars settlement.

**The Blackfriars Cross**  
This stone cross originally stood in the cemetery of the Dominican Friary in King's Lynn. Dominican Friars were also known as Black Friars due to the colour of their habits. The friary was founded around 1220 and sited in the area where you are now standing.  
By 1539 the Friary could house 40 Friars and was one of the wealthiest in Lynn. It was closed in 1539, following the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. No part of the building now remains.

The cross is thought to date from the 13th century, but may be older. This side shows Christ crucified, above Saint Michael the Archangel and a Dragon. The other side is very worn, but may show another image of Christ.

The cross was discovered in the 1840s when the last of the Friary's walls were demolished. Statues in stone coffins were discovered at the same time. For a long time the cross was on display under the City's Town Hall, before being returned to the site of the Friary in 2004.



Now cross over **Paradise parade** into **Broad St** and down **Chapel Street**, Turn right into **Austin St**, so called because it is the site of the.....

## 7. Augustinian Friary also called **Austin Friars**

This was the largest of the Friaries and the most prestigious. It was **founded in 1293** on land given to them by Margaret de Southmere.

In **1383 King Richard III** granted a licence to the friary to build an aqueduct to bring them a supply of fresh water from Gaywood. The luxury of fresh water was being granted to a third Friary, whilst the general populace would have had to use salt water and drink small, fresh, cloudy ale.

Over the next few years, (**1406-1413**) the **Augustinians** added to their campus which was an indicator of their wealth and influence. The order was renowned for its "Exceedingly profitable altar" also called the Scala Coeli (stairway to heaven).

**Henry V, VI**, were well known visitors to the Friary, together with **Henry VII** and his Queen, Elizabeth of York. Margaret Beaufort, Arthur, Prince of Wales also stayed here.

## 8. The green plaque in the Austin Street Arch

(all that remains of the Friary) reminds us of this. The arch is a grade 2 listed building, which backs on to Austin Street car park



The Lattice House

**The Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII**, saw the surrender of the Prior and 14 brethren from Austin Friary House in **1539**. In **1545** a certain **John Eyre**, no less, was granted the lease!

**Finally**, after passing through several hands, the Friary's final owner, John Lease demolished it and sold the stones and the site. You are nearing the end of the Friary trail but there is a bonus! Retrace your steps to **Chapel Street** and there you will come across.....

**The Lattice House** which is now a public house in a grade 2 listed **Tudor** building dating back to about **1480**. It retains many of its timber framing and roof structures and is a fascinating building which was originally built as a merchant's house. Bishops' Lynn was the third busiest port in England at the time!

It may well have housed a small chapel, a gate chapel to the Friary. There is the vestige of what appears to be a piscina, a shallow basin which is usually placed near an altar for the priest to wash his hands. One wonders if the wealthy merchant hedged his bets and had an on-site chapel to keep in with his Lord and the friars!

# Map of Friary Trail



1. Whitefriars Arch
2. St Margaret's Minster
3. Claustral Buildings
4. Thoresby College
5. Greyfriars Priory
6. Blackfriars Friary
7. Augustinian Friary
8. Lattice House

"Grateful thanks go to Reverend Canon Peter Rollings for generously sharing his Friary knowledge which formed the basis of our project"

We hope you enjoyed this u3a Town Trail. This and other trails are available on the King's Lynn u3a website: [www.kingslynnu3a.org.uk](http://www.kingslynnu3a.org.uk) Then select 'Town Trails' from the menu. Or just scan the QR Code.

