

A Short Guide to Bury Abbey and the Abbey Gardens.

A-----Abbey Gate of 1345; entrance to the monastery for visitors and people on business-62 feet high; 13 yards wide and 17 yards deep.-
The Norman Abbey Gate 1120-1327 was directly opposite Abbeygate St.
Precinct wall of monastery on each side; 1120; raised after riots of 1327; stripped of surface stonework 1539; renovated c1831.

B----The Great Courtyard, which stretches 175 yards across and, was 152 yards wide. Its large size hidden by the trees and bushes of the Botanical Garden established here in 1831. In 1912 it became a public free park, rented by the borough council from Lord Bristol; it was bought by the council in 1953. The present lay-out of the circular flower gardens dates from 1936.

To the right were the Almoner's offices (gifts to the poor); to the left were the stable block for the horses of visitors and their servants. In the corner were the pigsties and cowsheds; since 1955 there have been public conveniences, rebuilt in 1990. Down the side walls, behind the blind persons' aromatic garden is the front wall of the monks' brewery.

C----From the centre of the flower gardens; to the right/south is the 19 foot high curtain wall with its buttresses. This gave privacy to the Abbots' Palace (1185-1285) in the 'Palace Yard'. That palace was later used as the monastic law courts, ^{because} for the abbey ruled West Suffolk.)

In the distance is the new east end of the Cathedral; 1970; its roof ridge is 68 feet high. It extends right up the the west end of the former abbey church. The appearance and height of the abbey is not known. Using information of abbeys of similar age and size I've estimated the heights. The tall West Tower was, possibly, 160 feet with its spire rising to 280 feet. There were octagonal towers on each side which, possibly, rose to 130 feet with spires reaching 215 feet in height. The long nave would probably have had walls rising to 70 feet and its roof reaching 105 feet. Away the the far left was the central bell tower rising to c 150 feet with its spire reaching c 170 feet.

C2---The bowling green was laid out c 1912. The monastic West Range of 1200 ran along its edge. By the end steps was the turret tower of the Cellarer's offices (which dealt with the food and drink for the 80 monks and the numerous visitors staying at the abbey). Away to the far left, in the Water Gardens were the Kitchen and the Larder block.

C3---On the other side of the gardens, behind the trees, is the refreshment kiosk (built for the Head Gardener in 1831). The birds' cages were where the nurseries and greenhouses used to be, up until c 1955. Behind is the front wall of the monks' bakery, mill buildings and the 66 yard long granary store.

C4---Across the river side of the flower gardens were, to the far left, the abbots' stables. The 18 foot high wall in the garden was the front wall of the abbots' bakery and brewery. Between the mansion and the

central path was the large King's Hall. This and the other buildings in this range was built in 1285 and was demolished in 1720. The central path passes through the site of the abbots' Kitchen and Buttery. Just to the right/south was the Abbot's Palace. The ruins of the ground floor and tower turret of the Queen's Chambers can be seen and beyond, where the two oak trees rise up out of the earth debris, is the end of the long dormitory block. The buildings around the Abbot's Palace had walls of 30 feet ^{14 ft} and a roof ridge rising up to 55 feet; the tall Scots Pine close by is c 60 feet tall.

D----The fountain monument by the curtain wall was erected outside the Corn Exchange in 1870 and resited here in 1939. Between the bowling green and the 19 foot stone wall was the approach to the Cellarer's Gate. This, with its Chapel of St John above, was where the bowling green office is.

E D2---Looking across the bowling green there was another of the Cellarer's buildings running along the near side of the green. Away to the right the south side of the green was the site of the Black Hostry building for visiting Black (Benedictine) Monks. Behind this on the far side are the 7 foot lower walls of the former Refectory/canteen (1105). Behind the seating pavilion of the Water Gardens was a narrow yard and, on the left/north side, the monastic kitchens and larder building. The Water Gardens were laid out in 1959 after the successful Magna Carta celebrations at Bury.

F1---Ahead are the remains of the abbey's West Front of 1140. The flint wall, rising to 39 feet, is all that remains of the far, interior, wall of the North Tower which once rose 130 feet with a spire reaching 215 feet. The highest parts of the West Front still remaining are only 54 feet and the Cathedral's east end is merely 68 feet high. The buildings over the wall to the right are the cathedral's Song School, Treasury, etc.; 1990.

F2---The Old English Rose Garden was laid out in 1948. It has associations and memorials to the squadrons of bombers and fighters which operated from the Bury area in the Second World War. The North Tower rose up, in part from the corner of this garden. The Victorian buildings over the wall fill the site of the Chapel of St Denis in the abbey West Front (1140). Originally the parish church of St Denis was built here in 1075 for the people of the New Town of Bury (which the monks were developing up on Corn Hill). The abbey was built further west than envisaged in 1075, so the church was demolished and rebuilt, as (ST) James, away to the right/west. Even the London to Thetford and Norwich main road, which had run since mid Saxon times along the site of the West Front, was diverted over to Angel Hill.

The long Guest Hall block (1105; rebuilt 1185) stretched across the half of the Rose Garden opposite to the cathedral. Beginning over on the bowling green it extended into the gardens to the abbey's nave. At that end was the Outer Parlour and the Abbot's Hall of 1105-1185.

G----The Cloister Gardens cover the site of the Cloisters. These covered walks around an open square measured 52 yards x 50 yards (Those at Norwich are of a similar size and can still be seen). The Cloister

Gardens were formerly private and were only opened to the public in 1937. Over by the large Copper Beech tree a library was built, above the Cloister Walk, in 1430. After that at Canterbury, it was the largest library in England. The cloisters at Bury are, unusually, on the north, rather than the south, side of the monastic church. There was an entrance into the nave over by the brick building in the corner and a second entrance to the monks' Choir in the nave over by the corner of the low fence, near the main ruins.

G2---The Refectory/canteen of the 80 monks lies along the north side of the Cloisters and it measures 53 yards x 17 yards. In early Victorian times it was turned into a walled garden; hence the end seating pavilions and the ground level, raised some ~~4~~ feet. The monastic serving hatch and door leading to the Kitchen Court can be seen at the left/west end.

H---At the gate by the tall ruins of the North Transept can be seen the Trayle, the monastic corridor stretching 66 yards alongside the abbey church towards the river. The first part was the Inner Parlour (1105; rebuilt and widened 1220). Beside it was the Chapter House, the staff room and meeting place for the daily business meetings. (1105; rebuilt in its present longer, narrower form 1220). It measures 33y x 13y and its walls probably rose to 25 feet with a roof reaching 40 feet. (The North Transept ruins close by rise to 19 feet and the St Martin's Chapel's ruins to 24 feet).

H2---The covered Cloister Walk would have run along the present low fence. Away to the left/north was the entrance to the staircase to the long Dormitory building. This stretched 53 yards north towards the trees and Queen's Chambers. The semi-circular entrance was that of the Treasury. To the left was the entrance to the Warming Room. Beyond this, beneath the 5 foot bank were the Chamberlain's Department' workrooms beneath the dormitories; the tailors', the cobblers', the leather workers', and the cloth and laundry personnel's. The laundry was beneath the Reredorter block to the right.

I---The Reredorter washroom block measured 30 yards x 14 yards. The north-east corner of this large building can be seen over by the entrance gate. Running along its north side, but separate from the former wall, is a line of buttresses which carried the waste water drainage pipes down to the river. The south side of the building was where the line of the trees are now. The ground level of what was the laundry washhouse beneath the monks' washrooms is now c 5 feet higher. The carved stonework on the drainage buttresses on the north side, by the fence, is one of the few remaining examples of the smooth surface stone of the 1100's, which once covered the flint infill of the monastic walls. Much of that stonework came from Barnack near Peterborough.

J---Go back to the Chapter House. On the other/north-east side is a narrow L shaped building; this was the novice school, on the ground floor, and the pre-1430 library, upstairs.

K---The Prior's Hall of 1105; rebuilt 1395. The Prior was the real manager of the monastery since the abbot was often away on affairs of

Church and State. The Prior's walled garden lies on the west/Chapter House side. The Prior's Hall stretched from the tree line to the north. At this end of the building was the Prior's study and offices, with the Buttery below. In the central part were the kitchens with the Great Chamber above. Away to the right/ south were the pantry and larder, with the rooms of the Prior's chaplain priest above. Until 1276 these two could use the Rotunda Chapel (1020) just across the Trayle in the monks' cemetery close to the abbey's east end. After 1276 the Prior's new Chapel of St Stephen and St Edmund was built, on the other side of the hall, extending out to the low fence.

L ~~12~~---A cobbled drive passed by, from the Abbot's Garden beyond the Reredorter, down to the river bridge. On the other side of the drive, in the corner of the low fence, can be seen the residence of the Prior's two squires. Behind, just over the fence, was the Prior's long stable block.

M---In the Little Cloister Court, close to the tennis courts, can be seen the odd shaped entrance porch to both the Infirmary Chapels and the Infirmary/Hospital Hall. The 66 yard long Trayle does a sharp turn here, to run parallel with the Infirmary Hall, across the tennis courts and beyond the Victorian garden wall.

M2---The original chapter house of the Saxon abbey (1020-1105) was sited here in this Little Cloister Court. The Saxon abbots had their Chapel of St Benedict here. Its east wall can be seen just across the low fence. Beyond, down the slope, the later monks added the Chapel of St Michael in 1230. Running off from these, half way across tennis court No 3, was the Saxon abbey's hospital. In 1180 the New Infirmary^{HALL} was built, stretching halfway across tennis court No2.

M3---The Trayle that ran alongside continued into the area of the private gardens. Here the Sacrist had his Chapel of St Andrew and his numerous workshops. He was in charge of the building and maintenance operations at the abbey and at the monastery's many properties and farms in Bury and West Suffolk. Here too was one of the English coin mints, between 900 and 1327.

N---The path by the children's swings was the pre-1735 course of the R. Linnet; it used to run parallel with the R. Lark up to the Abbot's Bridge. Alongside the Linnet ran monastic buildings and walls. At this end, stretching along parallel with the tennis courts was Bradfield Hall. This was the probable site of the original hall built by Bederic, when he established the first settlement at Bury in mid Saxon times c 600. Later the Infirmary^{HALL}/doctor used this Bradfield Hall for his offices and additional rest rooms; Edward 11 stayed here in the 1320's.

N2---Behind, in the right/south side of tennis courts Nos 2 and 3 was the Bradfield Spanne buildings. It was erected in 1260.

O---A monastic wall ran along the banks of the Linnet (the present path) for some 200 yards to the 'Dovecote' tower at the far corner of the Abbot's private garden. There was in fact a similar tower to this

one at the near corner, just before the line of beech trees. A slight mound at its base can be seen, just right of the path. The bridge across the Linnet was sited half way between the tennis courts and the beech tree avenue.

P----Go briefly back into the flower gardens, just to view the Abbot's Palace range (1285) close up. (Information back in C4). Beside the Queen's Chambers is the memorial erected by the Dunkirk veterans in 1986. Behind is the concrete platform on which a captured German tank was placed, after the Great War. It was removed in 1933. The wall behind was that of the Larder block (1200) and the Water Gardens of 1959 were laid out across its site and that of the Kitchen to the right.

P2---Around the central path, where the Abbot's Palace stood, there used to take place band concerts, community singing and inter-denominational church services in the summers of the 1930's, 1940's and early 1950's. In 1578 Queen Elizabeth 1 and her courtiers stayed at the Abbot's Palace for three days; in 1961 Elizabeth II visited the Abbey Gardens and the Cathedral during her royal tour of Suffolk.

Q----The slope down to the Dovecote Tower was part of the Abbot's private garden (and had been since Saxon times). The north wall to the Dovecote had a range of buildings alongside it; one of the doorways out to the Abbot's watermill can still be seen. The Dovecote tower was probably used as a summer house. The Linnet flowed along and round past this corner tower towards a millpond over by the fence of Alwyne House.

Q2---The water mill was sited over by the path running alongside the fence. The Linnet then flowed away to the right, to join the Lark over by the Abbot's Bridge. The watermill was demolished in 1735 and the course of the river filled in soon afterwards. The present lawns around here were the site for the successful Pageant of 1907.

Q3---Alwyne House was built c 1785 on the site of the Abbot's bakery and brewery. This mansion, in private hands up until 1989, was in fact built against the 18 foot west walls of the monastic buildings.

R1---The Abbot's Bridge was originally built to carry the precinct wall over the river when the vineyards were laid out and enclosed in 1211. A bridge for the monks was built on this side of the high wall.

R2---The high precinct wall dates from about 1120, but it has been heightened, possibly in 1330, when the Abbot's Bridge was renovated. Since then the flint work, both here and along other stretches of the precinct wall, look as though they were renovated in Victorian times. The Abbot's stables were sited by the monastic exit into Mustow Street.

R3---Turn right; walk along the precinct wall; impressive buttresses; the street was much narrower until 1926. At the end the East Gate controlled the main road from Norwich. You can still look up the stone chimney stack of the gatekeeper's residence, up against the wall. The Abbot's Bridge was renovated c 1330 in the Decorated style. A pedestrian footbridge was provided under the flying buttresses.

If you wish to go more directly to tour the ruins of the abbey church, go to T. Walk back to the Abbey Gate and turn left to the Norman Tower about 150 yards away.

S----Cross the R Lark to the monastic vineyards. The walled enclosure was established in 1211 and grape/wine production did well until the changes in the English climate c 1330. The Martins, a modern-looking retirement home was established here by the Methodists in 1962. The large Victorian building of 1883 was formerly the grammar school up until 1972. Since 1985 it has been renovated and used for private flats. The St James' Middle School uses the grammar school's 1955 buildings.

On the abbey side of the river the trees and bushes of the private gardens cover the site of the Sacrist's workshop and coin mint. A bridge crossed the river here. The diverted course of the Linnet flows into the Lark and in the low-lying area between were the monks' many fishponds.

S2---The Kevelaer Way bridge was built in 1989 and its path crosses the south end of the monks's fishpond area. The car park was built on the site of nurseries (1821-1964); the new offices of the West Suffolk County Council were erected, just over the precinct wall, in 1968.¹⁹⁶⁸

S3---This churchyard had to serve the parishoners of the two town parishes from c1120 until 1855. The borough council took control of the Churchyard in 1798. In 1799 the Abbey Precinct mansion was built and soon afterwards the owner planted the large trees nearby.

S4---St Margaret's is a mansion of 1736, built on the site of the Chapel of St Margaret, demolished in 1539. Since 1982 it has served as the Registry for civil marriages in Bury. The large building next door was built in 1906 as the new Shire Hall for the County of West Suffolk. It stands on the site of the Shire Hall of 1578, which was rebuilt in 1804 and renovated in 1841. The 1804 Assize Courts are still used by the Crown Courts. Huge crowds used to gather around it at the time of important trials, such as that of the Red Barn Murder of 1828.

S5---St Margaret's Gate was demolished c 1764.¹⁷⁶¹ The Manor House opposite was built in 1738. Formerly the judge's lodgings, it was renovated in 1990 for use as a museum.

St Mary's church was resited from its Saxon position over by the present abbey ruins in about 1115-1125. It was now close to the, then, centre of the town (around the present brewery area). Its 70 foot tower was rebuilt in 1395 and its impressive nave and side aisles were rebuilt between 1430 and 1445. The east end was extended and rebuilt c 1470. It is now one of the largest churches in the country. Inside is a very fine angel roof of 1445 and the tomb of the 'Mary Rose' princess.

S6---The avenues of 60 foot high lime trees were planted c 1720 as tree-lined promenades, at a time when Bury was a meeting place for the region's gentry, in Georgian and Regency times.

S7---The mansion of the Provost (Dean) of the cathedral was built in 1730 by a Mr Clopton. It served as a retirement home for Bury people.

S7---The railed off ruins nearby are those of the ground floor of the Charnel Chapel of c 1300. Skulls and bones unearthed to make way for new burials in the town's graveyard, were reverently deposited here. In the chapel upstairs chaplain priests prayed for the souls of the dead. The Charnel Chapel was closed down in the Reformation, in 1548. Its ruins were railed off in 1794 and turned into a private family's mausoleum.

The memorial to the Protestants who were burned to death at Bury in Queen Mary 1's reign was erected in 1903.

T----Cross over to ~~the~~ Chequer Square for the best view of the Norman Tower. This was built about 1135 and was the main processional entrance to Bury Abbey. It is 86 feet tall and is one of the finest examples of Norman/Romanesque architecture in Europe. Fine Norman pattern work on the facade (but not the projecting gargoyles, which were added when the Victorians restored this bell tower in 1846.) Interesting Norman cat face designs on each side of the porch. The railed off area was excavated in 1846, to reveal the original ground level prior the the general raising of the ^{ground} surface following the 1439 floods.

U----St James Cathedral. Originally sited at No 1A West Front and resited ^{from} here in c 1135. Rebuilt in the Perpendicular style 1499-1525 when its West Front was extended beyond the precinct wall into the street (like St Mary's in 1430). The Victorians renovated the church between 1862 and 1869 when it received its 64 foot high nave roof. The new Bishopric of St Edmundsbury was established in 1914 and in 1936 St James' was formally designated its cathedral. Elizabeth 11 visited the new entrance porch in 1961. Between 1964 and 1970 the east end was greatly enlarged, so that it now looked like a real cathedral.

V----The statue is of Edmund, King of East Anglia, who was captured and martyred by the Viking-Danes in 870. His body was reburied at Bury before 903. (The 'Bury' in Bury St Edmunds does not refer to this burial but rather the 'burgh' or fortified town of St Edmund). The statue was erected in 1974; formerly these lawns had been a railed-off area, with many gravestones and tombs.

V2---Only the lower half of the facade of the abbey's West Front remains. It was built in 1140 and in 1200 extended to a width of 78 yards. Bury's West Front thus became the widest of any English cathedral or abbey. The facade with its ^{Early English} decorations was redesigned following the demolition ^{of the central tower}, between 1430 and 1457; the ground level at the deeply recessed entrance arches had to be raised c 5 feet in 1439, following serious flooding.

V3---The facade was about the same height as the roof of the nearby cathedral. It lost its fine carved stonework after the Reformation, in 1539. At present, of the 70 foot facade, ruins rising to between 30 and 40 feet remain, with the highest parts above the left/north porch rising to 54 feet. The three deeply recessed porches, rising ~~26~~ ²⁰ feet, have had houses built into them in Stuart times. The 'Norman' designs of the doorways and windows were added by the Victorians when they were renovating the West Front in 1865.

V3---Rising above the 70 foot facade was the West Tower. This rose, possibly, 160 feet, with a spire reaching 280 feet. It was completed c 1205; partially collapsed in 1430; it was fully demolished and rebuilt by 1457 but was damaged by the fire of 1465 (which gutted the abbey church); it was renovated between 1475 and 1500 and demolished after 1539.

At each end of the long West Front were octagonal towers, of which only the southern/Sampson's Tower remains. This rose some 130 feet with its spire reaching 215 feet. All that remains is the bottom quarter, which rises 34 feet with a roof pinnacle of 47 feet. The lime trees beside it rise c 60 feet and the Scots Pine close by is c 90 feet high.

W---Walk round to the West Front end of the nave, by the Cloister Gardens. The long nave of the abbey stretched from the east side of the West Tower (in the centre of the private gardens) some 80 yards to the central tower. The 19 foot pier/pillar by the garden fence is the 6th out of 13 tall piers, rising to 70 feet, which ran down the north side of the nave; you are therefore about half way down the nave.

W2---The present ground surface slopes up from 3 to 5 feet towards the 7 foot high garden wall (1730), which runs along close the sites of the 13 piers on the south side of the nave. These piers/pillars were 2½ yards x 2½ yards in size and rose up to 70 feet, with roof ceiling arches rising up, to 90 feet, over the 12 yard width of the nave. A south aisle corridor, 6 yards wide, ran parallel, just over the garden wall, and a north aisle, 5 yards wide, ran close the the low fence by the Copper Beech tree.

A Pulpitum screen stretched across the nave and along^{east} to include the area beneath the central tower. This enclosed part of the abbey was the Choir for the frequent services of the 80 monks. Their entrance door from the Chapter House and Cloisters was by the corner of the low fence.

W3---The tallest ruins are those of the corner piers of the central bell tower. That in the north-east corner rises 33 feet, whilst the one by the garden wall corner rises 28 feet. The tower, built c 1114 in fact rose some 150 feet with a spire reaching 170 feet. At its base it measured 16½ yards x 16 yards. It collapsed in 1210 and was rebuilt; it was damaged by the Great Gale of 1361 and was repaired, heightened and had a new taller spire added by 1379; it was damaged in the fire of 1465 and repaired by 1475; it was finally demolished after 1539.

The plaque of 1849 commemorates the reported meeting here of the Magna Carta barons in November 1214. Up until 1956 the whole of this central area of the ruins were screened by the mounds and dells, trees and bushes, of the private garden called The Wilderness. Between 1956 and 1962 the archaeologists of the Ministry of Works gradually cleared this area (and excavated the crypt), so that the public could once again visit the central part of Bury Abbey, after 400 years of private ownership. (Elizabeth 1 sold the site in 1560 to John Eyer).

W4---The South Transept wing was built 1105-1120; it measures 28 yards x 16 yards; the walls would have risen 70 feet, and up to 105 feet at the

Churchyard end. There are the steps down from the east end's ambulatory exit would have been near the steps to the Crypt. The Chapel of St John the Evangelist had the Chapel of St Giles above (1150). The Chapel of St Nicholas faces towards the mansion of 1799.

W5---To get an idea of what the transepts would have looked like, visit those at the abbey-cathedrals at Ely or Norwich.

W6---The North Transept was built c 1105-1120 and it measures 30y x 16y. The site of Bury's original parish church, that of St Mary's was here, its nave stretching into the later St Mary's Chapel (now the Lady Chapel). The Rotunda Chapel was sited in the centre and was linked to St Mary's Minster church. Here the body of St Edmund was kept until the abbey shrine was built in 1095. St Mary's Church was demolished to make way for the North Transept c 1110 and both the St Mary's Chapel and the Rotunda Chapel of 1032 were demolished when the Lady Chapel was built in 1276, an early example of the cult of the Virgin Mary at this period.

W7---Tall 24 foot high ruins stand around the Chapel of St Martin. The end wall of the North Transept rises 19 feet (1/5 of its former height).

X---From the central tower area look straight ahead towards the tennis court fence; this was the Presbytery/east end, the first part of the Norman abbey to be built 1085-1095. With its semi-circular end and radiating chapels, it measures 37 yards long and 27 yards broad; Norwich has a similar east end although it is slightly smaller.

The Crypt, lying beneath, was cleared of debris in 1956; it was of a similar age and size as that at Canterbury. The radiating chapels were dedicated to St Anne (on the right), to St Mary in the centre and to the local boy 'saint' St Robert (1180).

X3---The Presbytery itself stretched over this crypt. Pilgrims visiting the Shrine of St Edmund walked along the ambulatory corridor around the edge, coming in from the left/north and going out by the south exit on the righthand side of the Presbytery. At the east end were the chapels of St Saba (on the left), St Nicholas and St Peter. The Lady Chapel was built alongside the north wall 1276 and within 20 years the Chapel of St Botolph had been built alongside the south wall, where the walled garden is now. The Shrine Keeper's offices lie under the large house.

X4---The High Altar was near the far end of the Presbytery/east end. Behind its high Reredos screen to its rear was the Shrine of St Edmund. Many valuable gifts were left by the pilgrims praying before the tomb of the saint, who was the patron saint of England between 900 and c1300. In 1538 Henry VIII sent officials to seize these numerous gifts and most of the remainder of the monastery's vast wealth. In 1539 he had the abbey closed down, and soon after it was demolished for its fine building materials (roofing lead, carved stonework, carved timbers and woodwork). Had there been a bishop resident here (as at Ely and Norwich) the abbey would have been left standing. The abbey and its precinct grounds were sold into private hands in 1560; the borough council bought the ruins and grounds in 1953; in 1955 the Ministry of Works took over the abbey buildings; in 1985 these came into the hands of English Heritage.