

## Eastern Cathedrals'



# Monarchs & Myths

A brief guide to the best Monarch and Myth stories  
at Cathedrals in the East of England



# Once upon a time...

Once upon a time a fair maiden and her family were experiencing the dilemma of finding something to do, when all of a sudden the fair maiden had a thought that spurred them into action - 'Let us visit our country's finest Cathedrals', she cried and at once the family rejoiced at this most exciting of ideas.



It has long been stated that England's Cathedrals are some of the finest places to visit in the UK. But did you know that the Cathedrals, particularly in the East of England, are home to some of the best loved stories, myths, legends and royal rumblings in our history?

From Katharine of Aragon's tomb at Peterborough, a beheaded King at St Edmundsbury and a right royal pair at Norwich Cathedral - the list of

intriguing Royal connections is endless, as are the stories and legends associated with their history. Ranging from missing limbs and a murdered minister to tales of scandal and much more besides - you are sure to



experience an eye-opening time at our Eastern Cathedrals, especially if you take part in a Cathedral tour!

Sadly, these beautiful age old places of Christian worship and historical intrigue are often overlooked as key visitor destinations but there is more to many Cathedrals than might at first meet the eye. We would be delighted to welcome you to any of our Cathedrals and hope you have the most wonderful time.



# A place to rest your head

Your journey to discover these hidden gems of Eastern England may require overnight accommodation. Below is a fantastic selection of hotels and B&B's within easy reach of some of our Cathedrals, so for details of some of the best hotels in your chosen area, please see below:



## **Peterborough - The Bull Hotel**

Originally dating back to the seventeenth century, this grade two listed building is Peterborough's premier hotel, and is the only AA recognised four star city centre hotel. The hotel has been carefully restored and tastefully refurbished, to provide guests with a high degree of four star comfort, whilst our friendly and efficient staff offers service and hospitality which is unrivalled in the city. For more information on this stunning hotel please call 01733 561364 or visit [www.peelhotels.co.uk](http://www.peelhotels.co.uk)



## **Bury - The Angel Hotel**

The Angel Hotel is where traditional Georgian elegance meets contemporary design. Originally a coaching inn it now harnesses its heritage with a modern twist, retaining traditional values and welcoming innovation. Call 01284 714000 or visit [www.theangel.co.uk](http://www.theangel.co.uk)



## **Norwich - The Maids Head Hotel**

The Maids Head Hotel is a 4-star recently refurbished hotel opposite Norwich Cathedral. Known to be the oldest hotel in the UK with many historic and royal connections. An ideal place to stay when exploring Norwich. For your special stay, contact the reservations team on 01603 272007 or email [reservation@maidsheadhotel.co.uk](mailto:reservation@maidsheadhotel.co.uk)

**For further information on these hotels please visit the local TIC for the corresponding area or for hotels in other locations please visit [www.visiteastofengland.com](http://www.visiteastofengland.com) for all the best accommodation in your chosen area.**

# The Eastern Cathedrals' Trail



**All Cathedrals on the trail can be reached easily by:**

Train - [www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com](http://www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com)  
or [www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk](http://www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) for more.

Car - M1, M11, A12 and A14.

Bus - [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com)

Cycle - [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

For a real pilgrimage experience,  
why not take time out  
and walk between each Cathedral?

# Peterborough Cathedral



## **Katharine of Aragon's tomb**

The first wife of Henry VIII, Katharine of Aragon, was buried at Peterborough Cathedral in 1536. Her tomb remains to this day and her life is celebrated every January with a colourful day of commemoration including worship, music and poetry.

You can find out more about this fascinating former Queen on a historic Cathedral tour around Peterborough Cathedral with one of our professional guides.

## **Mary Queen of Scots' former resting place**

Another intriguing Queen, buried at Peterborough Cathedral in 1587, was Mary Queen of Scots. She was later removed by her son and was taken to Westminster Abbey in 1617 but her former tomb remains and a display about her life can be found in the South Aisle.

## **The legend of St. Oswald's Arm**

The St. Oswald Chapel at Peterborough Cathedral bears witness to the legend of St. Oswald's missing limb.

St. Oswald's arm was blessed by his chaplain, Bishop Aidan, owing to his great generosity and long after St. Oswald died in battle in 642, his arm remained uncorrupted. This curious relic was brought to Peterborough in around 1000AD and guarded safely until 1539 when it mysteriously disappeared!

## **A murdered minister - Thomas Becket**

It has been said that the blood of murdered minister Thomas Becket, brought back in a phial to Peterborough Cathedral in 1177 by Benedict of Canterbury, is what funded the creation of one of the oldest surviving hand painted wooden Nave ceilings in Europe today and so in essence part of the Cathedral was built on Thomas Becket's blood. Pilgrims allegedly paid to drink a glass of water tintured with Becket's blood and the money raised was used to complete the building of the Nave. Novel fundraising indeed!

# Ely Cathedral



## **William the Conqueror and the cowering monks**

In 1072, William the Conqueror, having finally subdued Hereward the Wake (c.1035-1072) and captured the Isle of Ely, arrived unannounced at the monastery. He went straight to the old Saxon Minster, said a prayer of thanks, and left a gold mark on the altar as tribute. The monks were at dinner and had no idea he had visited until one of his knights burst in on them and informed the monks he had already left. The monks of Ely, fearful of the King's wrath, rushed after him and caught up with him at Witchford to beg his forgiveness.

He fined them the enormous sum of 700 pounds of silver for their resistance to his rule!

## **King Cnut and Candlemas capers**

A story recorded in the ancient Book of Ely tells of King Cnut (c.985-1035) journeying towards Ely in order to attend Candlemas. He reached Stuntney but the ice on the fens was not thought to be strong enough to bear the weight of the King's sledge. His servants looked round for a very large and weighty Saxon to skate ahead of the King's sledge to show them if the ice was strong enough. A certain Brithmer Budde (nicknamed 'Pudding'), volunteered and guided the King safely to Ely. He was rewarded with the grant of some land.

## **Cranky Cromwell closes Cathedral**

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), having suggested to the Cathedral authorities that they amend their elaborate sung services to a simpler form in accordance with his Puritan principles, found that this was being ignored. In the middle of a service, accompanied by armed soldiers, he stormed into the Cathedral on horseback and demanded that Dean Hitch bring the service to an end. As a punishment he locked the Cathedral, pocketed the key and for seventeen years the Cathedral remained closed.

# Norwich Cathedral



## **Simony and scandal surrounding first Bishop**

The founder and first Bishop of Norwich Cathedral, Herbert de Losinga, was condemned for committing the grave sin of Simony when he paid King William II a great sum of money to become the Bishop of Thetford in 1091. This necessitated a pilgrimage to Rome to seek Pope Urban II's absolution and legend has it his penance was to transfer the See from Thetford to Norwich and to build a Cathedral there.

## **The Cathedral and City at war**

In 1272 a long-brewing conflict between the people of Norwich and the Cathedral Priory erupted into a 3-day riot when the Priory was attacked and at least 13 deaths ensued. King Henry III was immediately summoned to Norwich and placed the city under administrators, exacted a fine of 3,000 marks, condemned 30 city men to death and withdrew the city's rights for 3 years.

## **'Altar'-ego for altarpiece hidden for many years**

The magnificent 14th century altarpiece, known as the Despenser Reredos or Retable, survived the Puritanical zeal of the 16th and 17th centuries disguised as a table, with the painted side facing down. It was later rediscovered in 1847 in a room above one of the Ambulatory chapels by a Professor Willis who dropped his pen, bent down to pick it up and happened to look up at the underside of the table – after which it was restored and reinstated in St Luke's Chapel.

## **Trumpeting Thomas carves his own tomb**

The memento mori tombstone of Thomas Gooding, with himself as a skeleton, is in the wall of the south aisle of the Nave at Norwich Cathedral. Tradition has it that he was a stone mason in Tudor times who carved his own memorial and is buried behind it in a standing position so that he might be ready for the trumpets heralding the Last Judgement.

# Chelmsford Cathedral



## **A new town is born**

The market and town of Chelmsford owes its existence to Bishop William de Sainte-Mere-Eglise. It was he who secured a succession of charters from King John which constituted the foundation of the new town. In 1199 King John granted William the right to hold a weekly market and in 1201 he then granted the right to hold an annual fair. The Bishop paid the King two palfreys for the privilege. The granting of these charters marked a new beginning for Chelmsford.

Market and town together have survived and flourished these past 800 years.

## **The Mildmay family save the day**

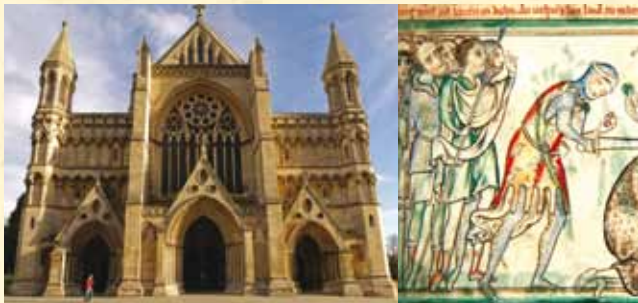
The Mildmay family are remembered at Chelmsford Cathedral for their influence on the town in its early days. Thomas Mildmay made his career serving as an auditor of the Crown's land revenues and was duly rewarded for his service to four Tudor sovereigns. Thomas later went on to found the first Chelmsford Grammar School and in 1565 he founded the alms houses and was generous to the poor. A colourful monument to the Mildmay family dated 1571 portrays Thomas, his wife Avice and their fifteen children at prayer.

## **The legend of the mythical bird**

According to legend, the gorgeously arrayed mythical bird depicted on the red frontal was said to have burnt itself to ashes after living for five or six hundred years and then came back to life with renewed youth. From early times Christian writers regarded it as an image of the Resurrection. After a major re-ordering in 1984, the red frontal was lent to Bristol Cathedral. Some time later, a fire in Bristol Cathedral damaged the altar frontal but after some skilful repairs it was returned to Chelmsford where it is now used again at Pentecost.



# St Alban's Cathedral



## **St Alban sacrifice costs his life**

St Alban, the very first Christian martyr, was executed by the Romans for refusing to make a religious sacrifice to the pagan Emperor. The story persists that his executioner's eyes fell out as punishment and early pictures of the event show this grisly punishment and there is now a shrine to St. Alban beneath the beautiful chantry Chapel in the Cathedral.

## **A right royal pair!**

Humphrey Duke of Gloucester (1391-1447) lies buried in St. Alban's Cathedral. The youngest brother of King Henry V, Humphrey was regent in England while his brother was fighting the French and during the minority of the king's nit-wit son Henry VI. The dreadful wife of Henry VI was the infamous Margaret of Anjou who is famed for stealing 'the veriest ruby' from St. Albans. She and her lover Suffolk wanted Humphrey out of the way - his death was always thought to be suspicious as Margaret and Suffolk then seized his property before he was buried at the Cathedral in 1447.

## **A Blessed Miracle**

In 1703 Humphrey's coffin was found and opened, and the body discovered was entirely uncorrupted, lying in a strange aromatic liquid. 'A Blessed Miracle', cried the people who flocked in thousands to view the corpse and buy thimbles-full of the miraculous liquid, clearly the must-have anti-wrinkle product of the Age of Reason. Ladies trooped up and down the tiny staircase to get that liquid, and at night the local inns sent alcohol to top up the coffin to maintain the supply and keep the visitors coming. Then people took bits of his body and now there is not much of poor Humphrey left. Aside from a few bones there is little left of this legend at St. Albans today but the mystery still remains as to where the ruby went that was stolen by Margaret of Anjou all those years ago.

# St Edmundsbury Cathedral



## **Edmunds meets untimely death**

Without the Legend of St Edmund, the town of Bury St. Edmunds may never have existed as it does today. The young Anglo-Saxon King of the East Angles, Edmund, met an untimely death at the hands of the Vikings, who defeated him in battle in AD869, then tied him to a tree, shot him with arrows and chopped off his head.

## **Beheaded King guarded by a wolf**

The legend continues that his head was later found being guarded by a wolf, thus allowing him to be given a Christian burial in the town which later took his name. Eventually a Benedictine Abbey was established to house the shrine of Edmund, now Saint Edmund. Alongside this Abbey, the small parish church of St James was built in the 12th century.

This became the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich in 1914.

## **Shrine of the King and Cradle of the Law**

So reads the town motto for Bury St Edmunds. The town's claim to being the 'cradle of the law' dates back to 20 November 1214, when a secret meeting is alleged to have taken place in the Abbey of St Edmund. The 25 barons of England met in secret and swore an oath that they would force King John to sign a new charter. The following year, King John agreed to the terms of the Magna Carta. The Cathedral Chancel is adorned with the heraldic coats of arms of the Magna Carta barons.

## **Reformation Church**

St James Church was rebuilt between 1503 and 1551, making it one of the first churches to be completed after the Reformation. The work was only completed thanks to a donation of £200 by King Edward VI, who also endowed the grammar school in Bury St Edmunds.

# Lincoln Cathedral



## St Hugh

When Hugh of Avalon was consecrated Bishop of Lincoln in 1186, the Cathedral was in ruins owing to an earthquake. He set about rebuilding in the new Gothic Style, even carrying a hod himself, so the story goes. Hugh was not afraid of criticising King Henry II and King John, while retaining their respect. King John was a pall-bearer at St Hugh's funeral in 1200, as recorded in the medieval Dean's Eye Window. Great numbers of pilgrims hoping for a miracle required more space. The resulting Angel Choir is a jewel in the crown of English Cathedrals. The saint's tomb is lost, but the base of his head shrine survives before the lofty east window.

## Queen Eleanor of Castile

In 1280 King Edward I and Queen Eleanor were present for the dedication of the Cathedral's Angel Choir. Ten years later, the mortally ill Eleanor hoped for a cure at St Hugh's shrine. She died just before reaching Lincoln. Her distraught husband had her body embalmed and her viscera interred in Lincoln Cathedral. On each stop along the funeral route to London he instructed a cross to be erected, ending at Charing Cross.

A monument in Lincoln's Angel Choir was identical to Eleanor's tomb in Westminster Abbey. It was lost in the Civil War, but restored in 1890.

## Katherine Swynford

Katherine Swynford was mistress then wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. John was not free to marry Katherine until his wife died, by which time the couple had four children who bore the name of Beaufort. Their births were legitimised after their parents' wedding in Lincoln Cathedral. Their descendant, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was the mother of Henry VII. Her tomb and chantry chapel are by the high altar.

# Locations & contact details

## **Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban**

Sumpter Yard, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 4BY

Tel: 01727 860780 Email: [mail@stalbanscathedral.org.uk](mailto:mail@stalbanscathedral.org.uk)

Website: [www.stalbanscathedral.org.uk](http://www.stalbanscathedral.org.uk)

Café, shop, tours, educational facilities

## **St Edmundsbury Cathedral**

Cathedral Office, Abbey House, Angel Hill,

Bury St Edmunds, IP33 1LS Tel: 01284 748720

Email: [cathedral@stedscathedral.org](mailto:cathedral@stedscathedral.org)

Website: [www.stedscathedral.co.uk](http://www.stedscathedral.co.uk)

Café, shop, tours, educational facilities

## **Chelmsford Cathedral**

New Street, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1TY

Tel: 01245 294489 Email: [office@chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk](mailto:office@chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk)

Website: [www.chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk](http://www.chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk)

Shop, tours, educational facilities

## **Peterborough Cathedral**

Minster Precincts, Peterborough, PE1 1XS

Tel: 01733 343342 Email: [info@peterborough-cathedral.org.uk](mailto:info@peterborough-cathedral.org.uk)

Website: [www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk](http://www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk)

Café, shop, historic & tower tours, exhibition  
& education programme

## **Lincoln Cathedral**

4 Priorygate, Lincoln, LN2 1PL

Tel: 01522 561600 Email: [visitors@lincolncathedral.com](mailto:visitors@lincolncathedral.com)

Website: [www.lincolncathedral.com](http://www.lincolncathedral.com)

Café, shop, tours, educational facilities

## **Ely Cathedral**

The Chapter House, The College, Ely, Cambridgeshire,

CB7 4DL Tel: 01353 667735

Email: [receptionist@cathedral.ely.anglican.org](mailto:receptionist@cathedral.ely.anglican.org)

Website: [www.elycathedral.org](http://www.elycathedral.org)

Café, shop, tours, tower tours, brass rubbing

## **Norwich Cathedral**

12 The Close, Norwich, NR1 4DH

Tel: 01603 218300 Email: [reception@cathedral.org.uk](mailto:reception@cathedral.org.uk)

Website: [www.cathedral.org.uk](http://www.cathedral.org.uk)

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exhibition, labyrinth, tours, shop



Alternatively, for more information on each Cathedral including details of services, concerts, exhibitions and special events please visit [www.easterncathedrals.org.uk](http://www.easterncathedrals.org.uk)  
Disabled access at all.