

King's Lynn Maritime trail

Discover the stories and places that tell the fascinating maritime history of King's Lynn.



Trail map inside

50p where sold

Introducing the maritime history of King's Lynn

King's Lynn was one of England's most important ports from as early as the 12th century. Steeped in maritime history, you can take a journey of discovery amongst fine merchants' houses and along cobbled lanes which stretch down to the River Great Ouse.

Starting with the town's early development in the 11th century when trade started taking place around a 'lin' or estuarine lake, the town quickly developed as a major port and became a very important base for trade between the local area and the cities of northern Europe, through the Hanseatic League.

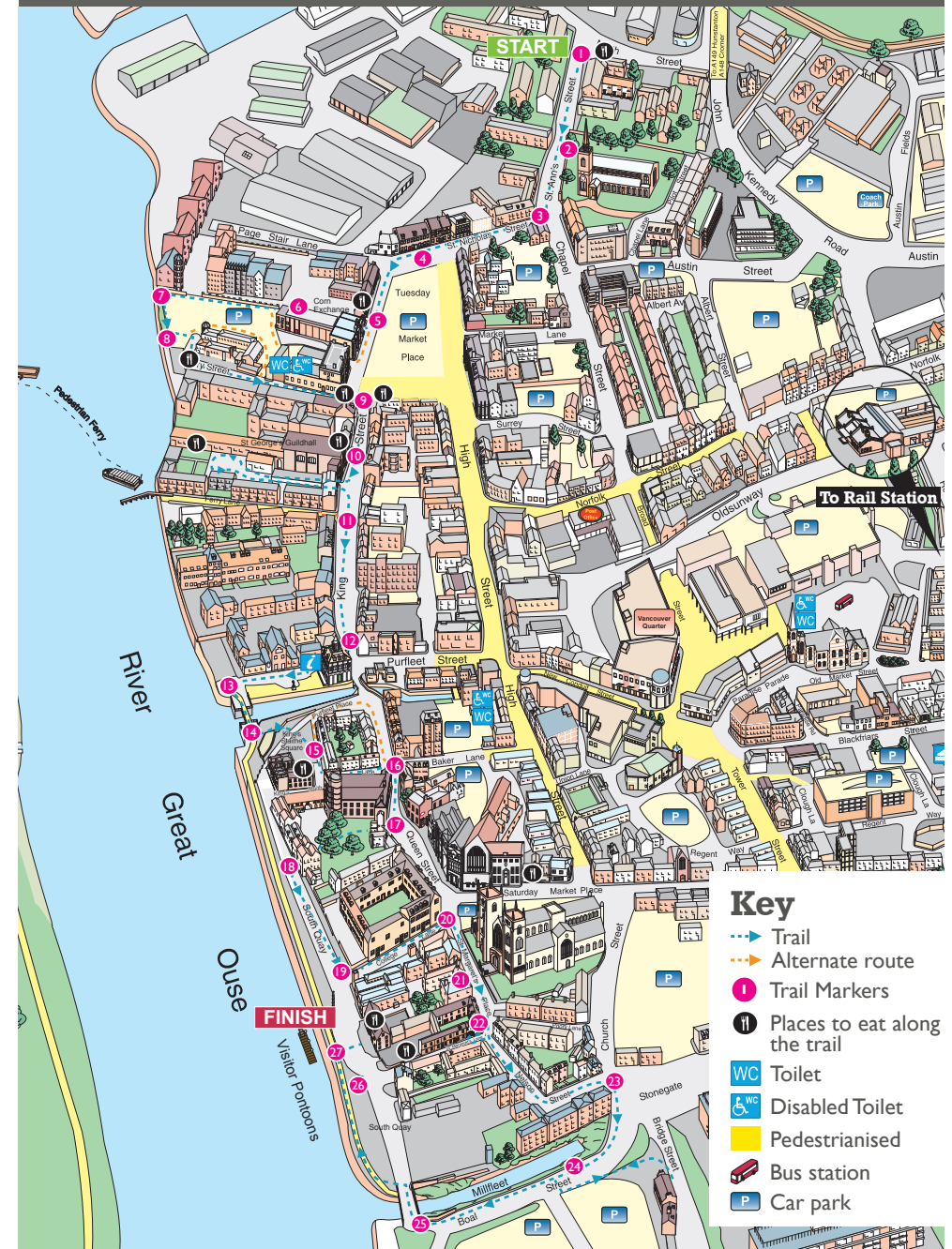
Throughout the centuries the town and its people have both prospered and depended on its maritime links for trade and business.

Famous merchants have made their mark on the town with magnificent buildings. King's Lynn has been the home of some of the great explorers and navigators, in particular Captain George Vancouver.

The stories of the merchants, traders and fishermen who would have known King's Lynn's quays, merchants' exchanges and warehouses throughout the centuries are here to be discovered. From the quayside areas along South Quay, Kings Staithe Square, the Purfleet and Common Staithe Quay through to the fishermen's cottages of the North End you will find a wealth of stories and characters to be discovered.



Follow the Maritime trail through historic King's Lynn



How to follow the trail

The notes and maps will help guide you along the King's Lynn Maritime Trail. The trail starts at True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum in the North End and ends at Marriott's Warehouse on South Quay.

Along the trail you will find 27 numbered plaques each linked to a key point on the trail maps in this guide. The plaques depict four different images reflecting the four different historic wards of the town which the trail passes through. Each plaque includes a directional arrow, which along with the route notes and maps appearing in this leaflet will guide you along the trail.



Take as long or as little time as you want to explore the trail. There are many points of interest along the way which you can take time to explore. Don't be surprised if you are tempted to stop for food or a drink. The town centre and high street offer a wide choice of places to eat. The maps included in this guide contain symbols indicating some of the historic venues where you could stop for food along the trail.

As a rough guide the trail should take a minimum of 90 minutes to follow, or considerably more depending on how often you stop to explore.

Access notes

The maritime trail takes you along ancient streets and amongst historic buildings in the heart of historic King's Lynn. Some areas of the route follows cobbled streets or places where pavements are very narrow. Where this is the case, the route notes overleaf highlight these locations and suggest alternative routes.

The historic areas of maritime King's Lynn

The Maritime Trail takes you through four of King's Lynn's historic wards which have been the scene of centuries of life and trade focused around King's Lynn's historic role as a port.

North End Ward

The North End is the home of King's Lynn's fishing community. The trail starts at True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum which celebrates the history and heritage of this community. From here the trail continues through the North End Ward, past St Nicholas' Chapel and on towards Tuesday Market Place before reaching the Common Staith Quay which for several centuries was the town's main public quay.



Chequer Ward

Running from the corner of Tuesday Market Place, toward the Custom House is the magnificent King Street. Behind the grand buildings on King Street, was a world of warehouses, breweries and merchants yards which were built on reclaimed land as the river was gradually pushed west. As you pass through this area you will see some of the complexes which typify this historic area of the town. Turning right at the Custom House, you will enter Purfleet Quay alongside the Purfleet which was the town's principal anchorage for ships since medieval times.



Trinity Ward

Crossing the Purfleet in the historic Trinity Ward, King's Staithe Square was an important place where merchants assembled and conducted business especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was the location of King's Lynn's first bank, now the Bank House. Passing through the old Trinity Ward you will also see the impressive merchant's mansion and tower (Clifton House) as well as Thoresby College built for priests of the Holy Trinity Guild in 1510.



Stonegate Ward

Turning down College Lane towards Saturday Market Place and King's Lynn Minster the trail enters the old Stonegate Ward. Saturday Market Place marks the location of the 'lin' or estuarine lake, which from the 11th century was almost certainly the location of a summer harbour market and summer fair which would have been a major attraction for traders from the Hanseatic League. Taking in locations such as Nelson Street, the Greenland Fishery (its name referring to Lynn's whaling fleet), Hanse House, Marriott's Warehouse and South Quay itself, the area reflects the oldest part of town where King's Lynn developed to become one of the major ports of England during medieval times.



Guided walks

As well as the opportunity to explore the maritime trail yourself, why not join one of the special guided walks, led by the King's Lynn Town Guides, which follows the maritime trail and helps you discover the sites, stories and characters behind King's Lynn's fascinating maritime history.

Led by one of the King's Lynn Town Guides, the maritime trail walk, which lasts approximately 2 hours will introduce you to many of the people and events behind the maritime stories of King's Lynn.

Contact the Tourist Information Centre for details of dates and times. Tel: 01553 763044.

Tickets: Adults £5; concessions £4;

Children £1.

The King's Lynn maritime trail walks are just one of series of themed walks exploring different parts of King's Lynn's history. The programme of walks are offered by the King's Lynn Town Guides.



The people behind the story of maritime King's Lynn.

Admiral Nelson

Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson, one of England's greatest heroes was born at Burnham Thorpe about 20 miles north of King's Lynn. His father The Reverend Edmund Nelson was rector at the local church. Growing up on the coast, the young Horatio learnt to sail on the local waters and through his active service would always ask his family to 'send me Norfolk news which is to me more interesting than any other sort'.

Captain George Vancouver

The statue of Captain George Vancouver (1757-1798) Lynn's most famous explorer can be found on Purfleet Quay. Renowned for having charted around 5000 miles of the west coast of North America, Captain Vancouver was born and grew up in King's Lynn where both his father and brother were employed at the Custom House.

Henry Bell

The architect Henry Bell was commissioned by Sir John Turner to design the Custom House which opened in 1685. Other buildings in King's Lynn including the Duke's Head on Tuesday Market Place were designed by Henry Bell.

Thomas Claybourne

Thomas Calybourne, one of East Anglia's wealthiest Tudor corn and salt merchants almost certainly built the Tudor Marriott's Warehouse on South Quay.

Thomas Sandell, Sir Walter Raleigh and John Smith

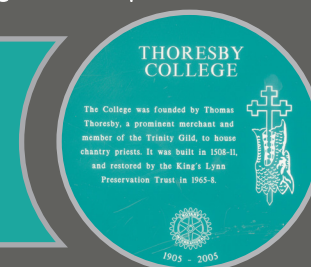
Thomas Sandwell, one of the richest merchants of his time, lived in St Nicholas Street. In 1589 he entertained Sir Walter Raleigh at his home. Among his apprentices was Captain John Smith who later went to Virginia and met Pocahontas.

Samuel Creswell

The family of Samuel Creswell, who during a five year expedition became the first man to traverse the North – West passage, lived at Bank House on King's Staithe Square

Look out for the green heritage plaques

Along the maritime trail you will see a number of green plaques installed to commemorate many of the notable locations and buildings. Many have connections with the people who have helped shape the history of King's Lynn.



The Trail

The notes and directions below will help you follow the King's Lynn Maritime Trail and will introduce you to many of the sites, buildings and stories throughout the town. How long you take to follow the trail will depend on the amount of time you wish to take exploring some of the locations featured along the way. As an approximate guide, the trail should take a minimum of 90 minutes to follow, or considerably more depending on how often you stop to explore.



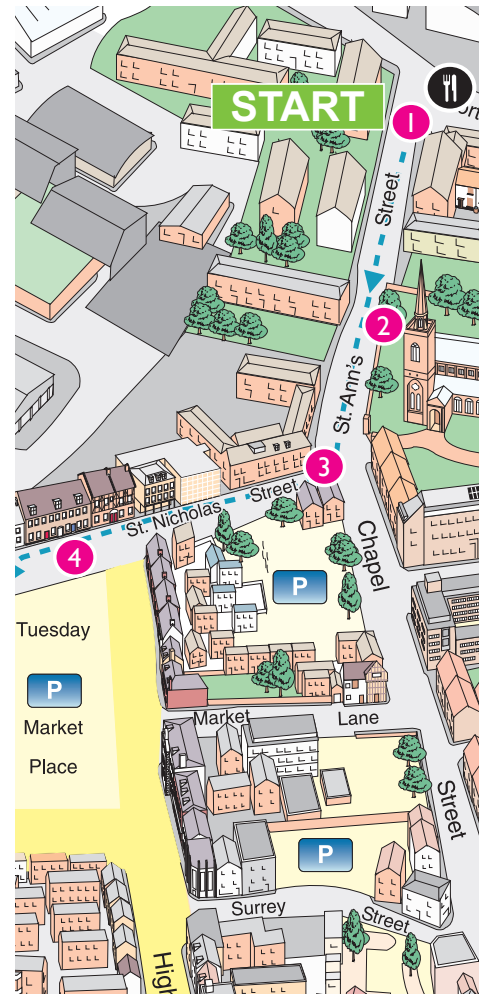
START AT TRUE'S YARD FISHERFOLK MUSEUM

1 True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum is dedicated to the heritage and lives of the people who lived and worked in the old fishing quarter 'The North End'. Central to the museum is a pair of Georgian cottages located in what is the sole surviving fisherfolk yard in Lynn. The museum also features Lynn's last Victorian smokehouse.

Museum and tea room open Tues – Sat: 10.00 – 16.00 (admission charge).

Walk south down St Ann's Street until you reach the main gate to St Nicholas' Chapel.

2 St Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors and merchants, gave his name to this magnificent Chapel, founded by the Norwich bishops in 1146 and enlarged about 1200. The present and much bigger Chapel was erected in the early 15th century. Today it is England's largest surviving parochial Chapel. During the great gale



of September 1741, the medieval spire which had been an important seamount for shipping, fell into the Chapel yard. A replacement was quickly raised until it was replaced with today's spire in 1869. Fine merchant memorials in the chancel reflect the prosperity of the port of Lynn during this period. St Nicholas' Chapel re-opened to the public in September 2015 after a £2.7 million restoration project. There are permanent displays and activities which help tell the story of this 715 year old building.

Open Tues & Sat 11.00 – 15.00 (winter) Easter - end Oct, normally Tues - Sat 10:30 – 16:00

Cross St Ann's Street and walk towards the corner of St Nicholas Street.

3 Turn right into St Nicholas Street and follow the footpath past the Tudor Rose Hotel towards Tuesday Market Place.

"The Tudor Rose" was built about 1500 as a merchant house with a shop on the street and the hall or living space beyond, both accessed through the fine traceried door with Tudor classical columns.

Opposite "The Tudor Rose" is the medieval gateway which marked the location of the famous "Black Goose" pub, home of the press gang when it was looking for "likely lads" or Northenders for the Royal Navy.

Continue along the path with Tuesday Market Place opening out to your left. Continue to trail marker 4.

Take care of traffic crossing the pavement at various points around Tuesday Market Place.



4 Once in Tuesday Market Place take time to admire this exceptional urban square. To your right (west side) are former merchant houses, Bishop's Lynn House (1725), and The Corn Exchange (1854) where merchants and farmers traded (now a thriving entertainment and concert hall). To your left (east side), "The Dukes Head" (1685) was a coaching inn but also a business and social centre for Lynn's traders (ships were auctioned for example). "The Maids Head" next door was, in contrast, a meeting place for smugglers from the Fenland and North Norfolk.

Follow the path round the edge of the market place towards the Corn Exchange.

5 At the Corner of the Corn Exchange turn right into Water Lane and follow the cobbled lane down towards Common Staith.

Take care this road is open to one way traffic which may be leaving the car park ahead of you.

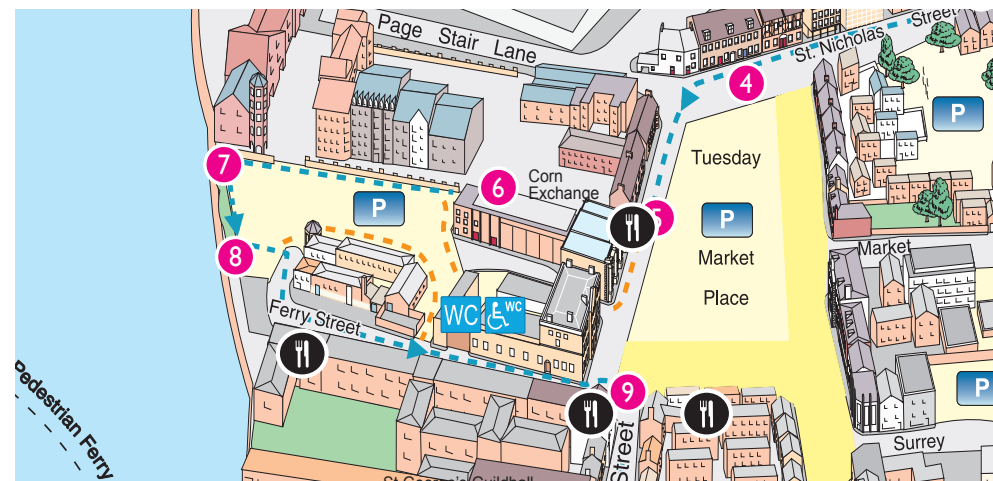
Access note: To avoid the cobbled lane, continue past the front of The Corn Exchange and take the next lane on your right. You can continue round to the rear of The Corn Exchange to re-join the main route. Part of this route is an active car park. Take care.

6 The Common Staith (now the location of the car park) was King's Lynn's main public quay from the 16th to the 19th centuries until the docks were constructed just to the north between 1869 and 1883. The stone Victorian quay line is clearly visible as you cross the car park. The quay featured warehouses, a ship chamber or tower and a large crane to take up heavy goods from the quay. Traders from outside Lynn had to pay local harbour taxes, including one for the use of the crane.

The ferry boat linking Lynn and West Lynn also disembarked passengers at the Common Staith, as well as vegetables and other produce for the weekly Tuesday market in the centuries before 1800.

Continue ahead through the car park toward the river and up onto the raised brick walkway.

Take care of vehicles when walking through the car park.



7 At the north end of the raised promenade there is a good view of the Estuary Cut, excavated in 1850-53 to bypass the wide and shallow former estuary (the nearby docks to the right were built into the old riverbed).

Follow the pathway south.

8 This straightening of the Ouse from the Common Staith to the Wash necessitated the erection of a new Pilot Tower (1864), attached to the town's public Swimming Baths (1856). The King's Lynn Conservancy Board (1898), which maintains the Wash approaches and the river; now occupies these buildings.

Follow the ramped path down to the car park. Turn right in front of the King's Lynn Conservancy Building and follow the road round to the left into Ferry Street heading back towards Tuesday Market Place and the junction with King Street.

Access note: The area in front of the Conservancy Board is cobbled. To avoid this continue ahead keeping the Conservancy building on your right and then round to your right, past the public toilets.



9 Turn Right into King Street.

Known as 'Stockfish Row' or 'Le Chequer' this became the preferred location for Lynn's merchants from the 14th century, as land was reclaimed allowing the development of merchants complexes running down to the river. The houses on the street now have handsome Georgian fronts telling of local prosperity in the past (with warehouses, breweries and yards behind). Pause to read some of the green plaques on these properties.

Continue toward King's Lynn Arts Centre.

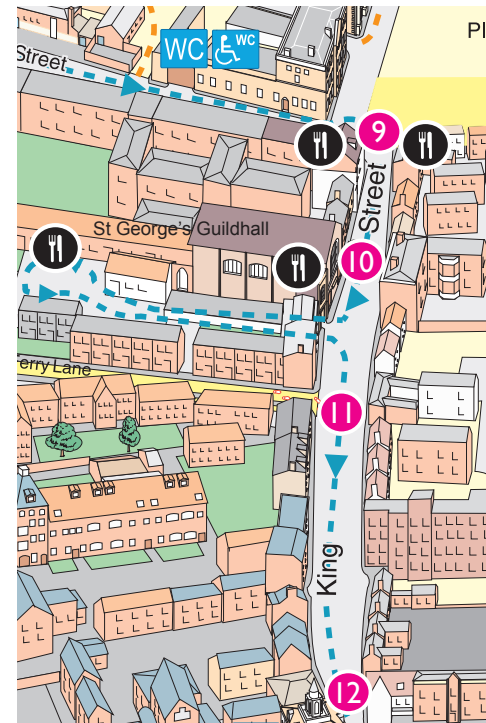
10 Turn into the courtyard of St George's Guildhall. The Guildhall, now a theatre and performance venue was built in brick by rich merchants probably in the 1430s. The long line of later warehouses running down to the river, which now includes a restaurant, are typical of Lynn. A blocked up entrance to the river, marks the watergate which enabled small boats to access Lynn's warehouses at high tide. It was also connected to the brick undercroft of the medieval hall used to store imported wine and to accommodate the ice blocks imported into Lynn from Norway for hotels and fishmongers.

Return to King Street via the passage under the hall if it is open and then turn right along King Street.

11 Ferry Lane leads down to the river where you can catch the pedestrian ferry to West Lynn. Opposite the lane on King Street, is a timber framed building which accommodated shops in the early 14th century but inside are the stone gables of an early merchant house of about 1180.

Continuing along King Street, you will pass the entrance to Aickman's Yard (next door to Wood House) which led to a ship repair business by the river. Note the handsome iron name-plate of "John Aickman's Foundry" with the date 1827 over the carriageway.

Continue along King Street towards the Custom House and Tourist Information Centre.



The Ferry. One of the best ways to see the maritime waterfront in King's Lynn is to hop on the passenger ferry to West Lynn, where you can get magnificent views back across the River Great Ouse towards King's Lynn. The ferry operates regularly Monday – Saturday.

12 This classical building, The Custom House, designed by Henry Bell for Sir John Turner was opened in 1685 as a Merchants' Exchange before becoming Lynn's new Custom House (1717). Smuggling was rife in the 18th century due to heavy taxation of wine, tobacco, coffee, tea and other luxuries. In the Custom House is a display about the Hanseatic League and King's Lynn connections with the other Hanseatic trading cities around the Baltic and North Sea. The building features other displays about custom men, merchants and smugglers as well as King's Lynn's famous mariners, Vancouver and Nelson.

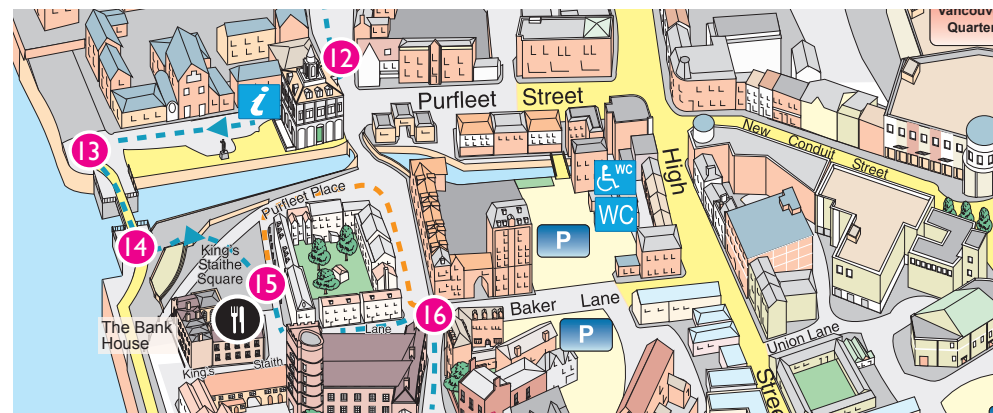
Displays and Tourist Information Centre open daily. Time vary slightly depending on season.

**Open daily from 10.00 Mon-Sat
(10.30 October-March)
Open from 12.00 Sundays**

Turn right onto Purfleet Quay, passing the statue of Captain George Vancouver (1757-98), who chartered 5000 miles of the west coast of North America. His father and brother were employed in the Custom House. Continue on towards the river and up onto the raised part of the walkway.

13 The Purfleet was the town's principal anchorage for ships since medieval times. Archaeological excavations in the 1960s demonstrated that it was much wider in the medieval centuries than today. The Purfleet was also the disembarkation point for British and continental pilgrims, arriving at the Port of Lynn en route to the Shrine of our Lady at Walsingham in North Norfolk, before Henry VIII forbade pilgrimages in 1536.

Look out for the compass set into the quay which celebrates some of King's Lynn's great navigators, explorers and traders.



Cross the bridge above the sluice gate onto the other side of the quay.

14 In front of you, King's Staithe Square which was a popular place where merchants assembled was still being used for dealing in commodities such as corn and wine in the 18th century. Beneath the square are extensive wine cellars built around 1700. A new crane was erected here in 1719.

Turn left and make your way across the square towards the Bank House Hotel.

Take care of traffic from your right.

15 The Bank House (now a hotel, bar and brasserie) was originally built around 1700, although the classical front must be a later remodelling when it became the home of Lynn's first bank in 1782. The single story brick banking hall was operational 1789 – 1869.

Proceed ahead to the left of the Bank House, then turning left into King's Staithe Lane. Follow the lane to the junction with Queen Street and turn right.

Take care. This lane is open to two way traffic.

Access note: King's Staithe Lane is cobbled and there is no drop kerb access onto the pavement in Queen Street at this point. To avoid using this cobbled route, turn left and follow the line of buildings along Purfleet Place and then right into Queen Street.



16 From the junction of King's Staith Lane and Queen Street, turn right along Queen Street.

Access note: The pavements along Queen Street are narrow.

You will pass Clifton House which has a classical front and porch with rare barley sugar columns. The house has an undercroft and tiled floor belonging to the medieval house. Extensively rebuilt in 1708 by Samuel Taylor, it became the town's grandest merchant mansion.

17 Turn right into the passageway known as Three Crowns Yard.

On the right hand side as you pass along Three Crowns Yard, you can see the impressive brick built Tudor tower, which was built by a merchant to display his wealth, provide accommodation and a look out for ships. In the 18th and 19th centuries "The Three Crowns Pub" also occupied part of this site.

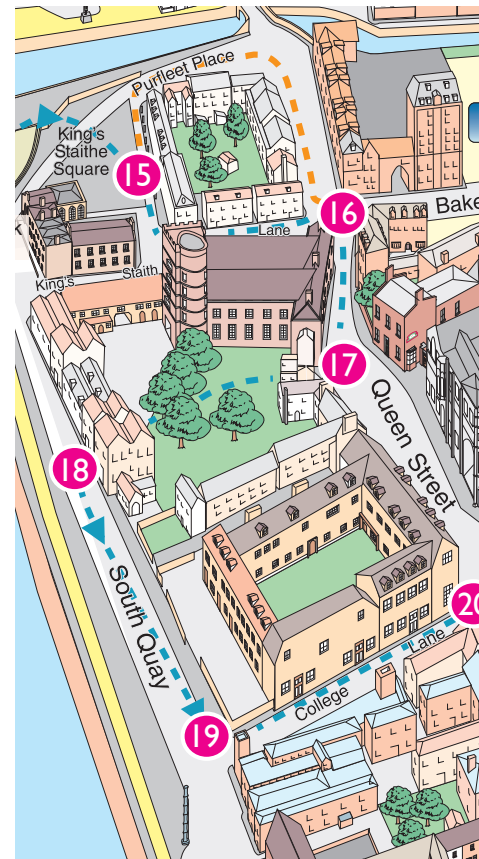
Access note: At the far end of the passageway you pass through a covered passage which has low headroom at both ends.

Continue through the passage and covered car park until you come out onto South Quay.

18 Turn left along South Quay and continue towards College Lane.

To your left you will pass Thoresby College, built by a local merchant for the priests of the Holy Trinity Guild in 1510. If you walk through the entrance, this leads into the courtyard which features a plaque marking the line of the 13th century quay. Ships from Europe were amongst those mooring here until rubbish dumping and silting caused the Ouse to move still further west!

Return along South Quay to the corner of College Lane.



19 Looking down College Lane the stunning chequerboard style building in front of you is the historic Town Hall.

Continue down College Lane and turn right at the end onto St Margaret's Place with Saturday Market Place to your left.



20 From the corner of College Lane, the magnificent structure of King's Lynn Minster, (formerly St Margaret's Church) is ahead of you. To your left is the imposing Trinity Guildhall (part of the town hall) from where the merchants of King's Lynn ruled the town through to the 19th century. It is also home to new Stories of Lynn Museum and Old Gaol Cells

Open: Daily from 10.00 - 16.30

The Saturday Market Place marks the shore of the Lin or estuarine lake and was almost certainly the location of a summer harbour market before 1100 where traders gathered to deal in salt, wool, cloth and luxury goods.

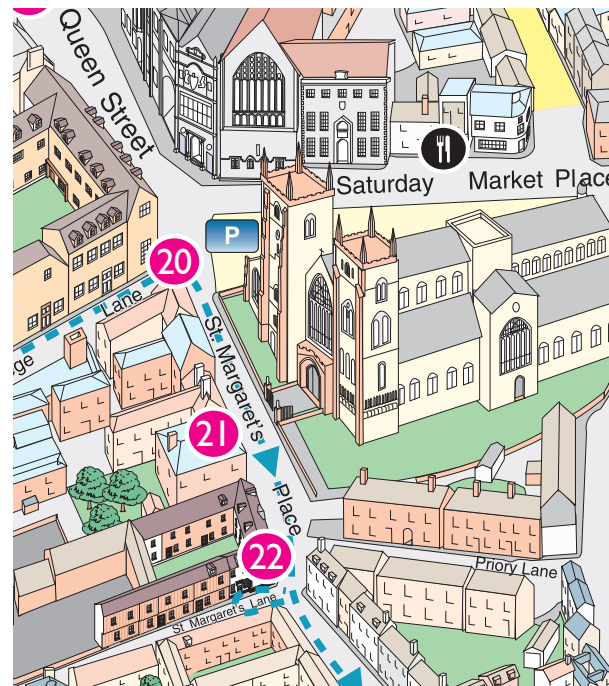
Continue along St Margaret's Place until you are opposite the main entrance to King's Lynn Minster.

Access note: There is no drop kerb to cross the road opposite the Minster, but fine views can be had from the path opposite the entrance.

21 The Bishop of Norwich built St Margaret's Priory Church here about 1100. It was much enlarged by 1220. In 2011 the present Bishop of Norwich designated St Margaret's as a Minster Church. Look up at the Moon Dial (1683) on the southwest tower, which shows the phases of the moon, and hence the tides, for the benefit of traders. On this tower was a tall spire which was used as a seamark by mariners, but it fell during a storm in 1741. Flood marks can be seen on the west door of King's Lynn Minster.

Minster open daily

Continue along St Margaret's Place to the junction of St Margaret's Lane, Priory Lane and Nelson Street.



22 Proceed into Nelson Street stopping at the doorway on the right leading to Hampton Court.

Take care of any traffic approaching from these three one way streets.

Access note: The far end of Nelson Street has limited pavement access. The road is one way. Take care of any on-coming traffic.

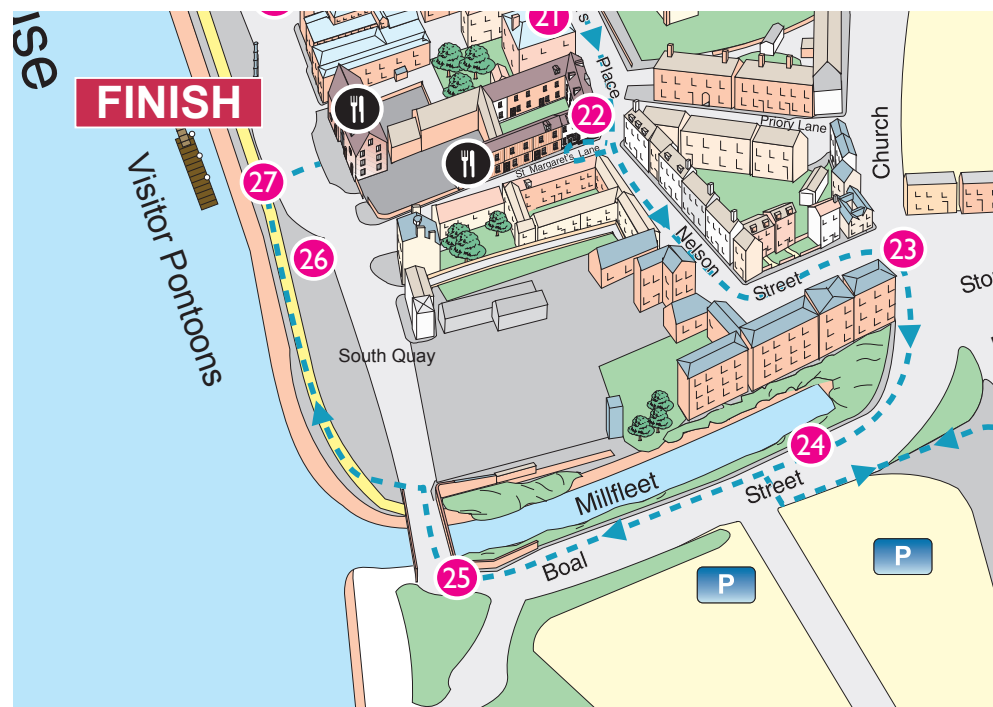
The late 15th century brick and timber front to Hampton Court was once shops. From the doorway looking into the courtyard, to the left (southside) is a 14th century merchant house which runs west towards the river; much altered but an original pointed arch doorway remains. The far west wing was a warehouse added about 1450 by the waterside.

Other medieval properties on the western side of Nelson Street were remodelled in the 17th and 18th centuries. Look out for green plaques on these former merchant houses. By far the largest is number 15 (Lath Mansion) rebuilt in classical style by the Browne merchant dynasty.

Continue along Nelson Street passing Victorian maltings. Turn right at the junction with the Millfleet.

23 From the junction of Nelson St and Millfleet, by the roundabout, follow the road round to the right and onto Boal Street.

You will pass the Millfleet which marks the boundary between the old Bishop's Lynn and South Lynn which was an independent maritime community until 1557. Across the road to your left you will see the 17th century Greenland Fishery.



Continue to follow the path round to the right along Boal Street.

24 From this point the trail carries straight ahead, or you can cross the road and follow the footpath to Bridge Street to see the Greenland Fishery.

Constructed in 1605 by John Atkin, "Atkin's Mansion" became "Greenland Fishery" in the late 18th century, when it was converted into a pub on the main road into Lynn from the south. The new name referred to Lynn's whaling fleet which sailed for Greenland every March, and returned in August (1760-1830). The fleet's base just south on the River Nar was called Blubber Creek. Many gravestones in the nearby All Saints' churchyard reflect the maritime character of South Lynn.

If you have gone to see the Greenland Fishery, return to where you crossed the road on Boal Street and carry on along the path towards the river.



25 At the corner of Boal St, follow the path round to the right and after the bridge cross the road to the path alongside the river.

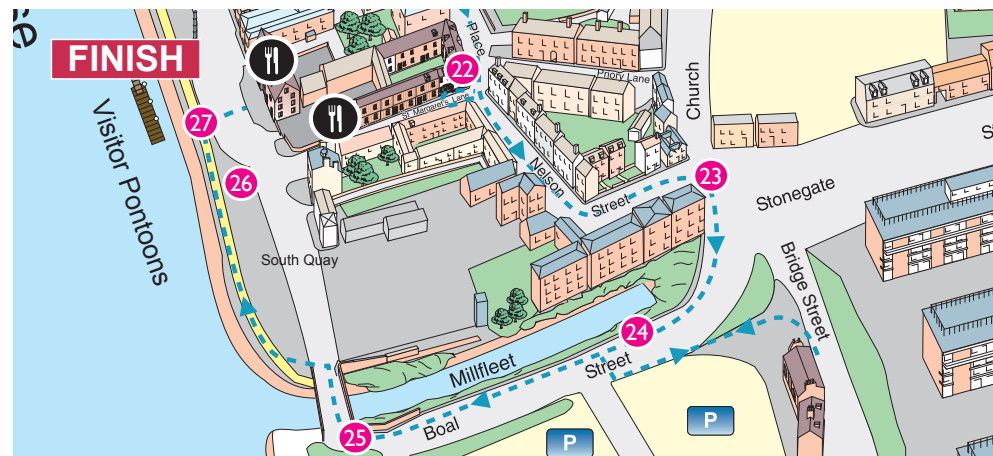
Take care of traffic when crossing the road.

To your left, the River Great Ouse continues upstream towards Denver Sluice (Approximately 10 miles away). Immediately to your left is Boal Quay. Today it provides moorings for King's Lynn's fishing fleet. In the 19th century two steam cranes were erected on the quay and it remained a working part of the port for King's Lynn through to the 1960s.

Looking downstream the river flows towards the Wash (approximately 3 miles away). The South Quay which you are on is now an excellent area to relax and enjoy the view along the river.

To your right the Sommerfeld and Thomas building is a fine example of Georgian brick warehouse. On the building next door, look at the roof line to see the only surviving 'Lynn lookout' (1848). This building was a pub called the Mariners Arms until the 1960's and was a popular haunt of sailors.

Continue walking along the quay.



26 Looking across the road to your right, is St Margaret's Lane. To the left of the Lane is Hanse House (renamed from St Margaret's House in 2009). This splendid complex of buildings around a courtyard spans the 15th – 18th centuries and is the last remaining Kontor or trading post of the Hanseatic League in England. This building would have been used by German merchants for their lodgings, offices, warehouses and as shops to sell their goods. The Hanseatic League re-developed the site after 1475 and it was used as their trading post until the 1560s when it was let to Lynn merchants.

Continue along the quay until you are opposite the front of Marriott's Warehouse.



Take care when crossing the road checking for traffic from your right.

27 Marriott's Warehouse was built as a Tudor warehouse, around the 1580s by one of East Anglia's wealthiest corn and sail merchants, Thomas Claybourne. Until the 1830s the building was actually on the riverbank. During the 1820s and 1830s as engineering works took place to straighten the course of the river a new sand bank was created, which subsequently led to the formation of South Quay. Soon railway lines were laid allowing goods wagons to access the new South Quay where cargo ships moored until the 1960s and later:

FINISH AT MARRIOTT'S WAREHOUSE



To discover even more of King's Lynn's rich trading and maritime history pick up a copy of the Free guide Discover King's Lynn.

Borough Council of
**King's Lynn &
West Norfolk**



Hanseatic King's Lynn a self guided trail



Deep rooted in the town's history, Lynn's role as a base for the Hanseatic merchants can be discovered along the maritime trail and can also be picked up using a separate leaflet – Hanseatic King's Lynn, a self guided trail.

Lynn Museum

More of King's Lynn's maritime and trading history including its role as a Hanseatic town are told at Lynn Museum in the town centre.

Open 10.00 – 17.00, Tuesday – Saturday
all year. Sundays (April – September
12.00 – 16.00)

Visit our website:

www.visitwestnorfolk.com

The site is packed with information about the history of King's Lynn and the splendid buildings and architecture which characterise the town.

Just scan the QR code ➔



Places to stay

For details of places to stay in and around King's Lynn use the website

www.visitwestnorfolk.com or
contact the Tourist Information
Centre.

For all your information needs contact King's Lynn Tourist Information Centre, which is open daily and located at the historic Custom House on Purfleet Quay.

Telephone: 01553 763044 E-mail: kings-lynn.tic@west-norfolk.gov.uk



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