

# Ely



— walk route (4 km)  
- - - options (xxxxx adds ?? km)  
— foot paths  
 shopping areas     pedestrian areas  
Q attractions named in blue  
12 references to notes

0.25 km  
1h 15m from King's Cross



ELY STATION

## Notes

Ely is built on a 23-square-mile Kimmeridge Clay island which, at 85 feet, is the highest land in the Fens. It was effectively an island separated from the mainland by freshwater marshes and meres within which peat was laid down, until draining commenced in the eighteenth century. Once the Fens were drained, this peat created a rich and fertile soil ideal for farming.

The Great Ouse was a major transport link, and at some time in the past the river was diverted nearer to the town, cutting of what was later called Babylon.

Although now surrounded by land, the city is still known as *The Isle of Ely*.

The city's origins lay in the foundation of an abbey in 673, on the Isle of Ely, under the protection of Saint Etheldreda, daughter of King Anna. This first abbey was destroyed in 870 by Danish invaders and rededicated to Etheldreda in 970 by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. The abbots of Ely then accumulated such wealth in the region that in the Domesday survey 1086 it was the second richest monastery in England.

### **A** Castle

Cherry Hill is the site of Ely Castle which is of Norman construction and a scheduled monument. The 250-foot diameter, 40 feet high motte and bailey is thought to be a royal defence built by William the Conqueror following submission of the Isle from rebels such as the Earl Morcar and the folk-hero Hereward the Wake. This would date the first building of the castle to c. 1070.

### **B** Cathedral

The first Norman bishop, Simeon, started building the monastery church in 1083, which would become a cathedral when the diocese was created in 1109 out of part of the Diocese of Lincoln. (Ely only gained formal city status in 1974.) Visible for miles around it became known as the ship of the fens.

The foundations for the Lady Chapel were laid in 1321 and this was thought to destabilise the foundations of the central tower/nave crossing, which collapsed in 1322, puncturing the subterranean structure below. The tower

was replaced by the much lighter, wooden Octagon tower, a feat of engineering and artistic design.

Nikolaus Pevsner believes the octagon "is a delight from beginning to end for anyone who feels for space as strongly as for construction" and is the "greatest individual achievement of architectural genius at Ely Cathedral".

In 1349 the Lady Chapel, the largest in England, was completed and subsequently other chapels were added.

The north west transept, later either fell or was demolished, possibly after a belfry was added to the west tower, but it was not replaced, giving the cathedral a lop-sided look and distinctive profile.

The 16th century reformation led to the dissolution of the monastery in 1539; the Cathedral was re-founded three years later with a Chapter of eight canons.

Restoration of the cathedral began 1750-70 by James Essex, and it was further thoroughly restored from 1845 and completed nearly thirty years later; most of the work was carried out by the architect George Gilbert Scott. The only pavement labyrinth to be found in an English cathedral was installed below the west tower in 1870.

### **C** Other buildings

On dissolution some of the monastery buildings were re-purposed. The oldest remaining buildings are the Prior's House and the central part of the infirmary complex, built in the 12th century. The infirmary was adapted for a college of secular priests. The main houses of the monks (dormitory, refectory and chapter house) disappeared. See key on back page.

### **D** Bishops Palace

The palace was built in the 15th century by Bishop John Alcock however the only surviving part of his palace is the east tower and the lower part of the west tower. The upper part of the west tower and the west wing, facing Palace Green was built by Bishop Goodrich in 1550 and the recessed centre part and the block facing south to the garden was built by Bishop Laney (1667-75) who demolished the major part of Bishop Goodrich's palace.

### **E** Oliver Cromwell

Cromwell inherited St Mary's vicarage and lived there for 10 years (1636-47), during his time as a tax collector and when he was already an MP.

The events of the first civil war took place during this time. The house is open to the public. Visiting details at:

<https://www.olivercromwellshouse.co.uk/>

### **F** Ely Museum

The museum covers the heritage of Ely and the surrounding fens, from the prehistoric creatures who swam in the ancient oceans to Ely today, including the ways of life from the wide wetlands to the rich farmland, and how the unusual landscape has shaped the lives of the people who lived here.

Evidence suggests the museum's building was originally built in the 13th Century and it has

had myriad uses, including being used as the gaol. Visit

<https://www.elymuseum.org.uk/>

### **G** Maltings, Cathedral Marina

The Maltings was built in 1868 as part of Ebenezer William Harlock's brewery complex on Ely's Waterside, where locally grown Barley was processed into Malt for brewing. It was converted into a public hall in 1971.

In front is the Quai D'Orsay, named shortly after the twinning of East Cambridgeshire District with the town of Orsay in France, in 1980/81. The first boathouse on the opposite bank belongs to the King's School Ely, while the second one belongs to the University of Cambridge. The Cambridge crew practice here before the Boat Race each year.

