



Discover Downham

Street Names Trail



St Edmund's Church

DOWNHAM MARKET originated as a Saxon settlement known as DUNHAM meaning "town on the hill". It is sited on the old Roman road, Ackerman Street. King Edward the Confessor granted the town market status in about 1050 A.D. confirming the right to hold a weekly market.

THE ORIGINS OF STREET NAMES TRAIL starts at Discover Downham, formerly the old Fire Station converted from the cottages of Raven's Row. The trail will take a maximum of one and a half hours, depending on how long you pause and enjoy!

1. From Discover Downham cross into **CHAPEL PLACE** which runs along the side of the old Mount Tabor chapel which was built by public subscription. On the side wall initials of donors are imprinted in some of the bricks. Although the building is used for storage now the original stained glass is still visible.



2. You enter **BRIDGE STREET** opposite the Whalebone. An inn with a long history and until recently called the White Hart but now restored to the original name, given when the inn sign hung from a whale's jawbone. The wall plaque gives information about its origins.

Bridge Street continues downhill, through Railway Road, to the bridge over the Great Ouse. It has been called Bridge Street since before 1840 but was formerly known as **COWGATE STREET** because of the gate stopping cows grazing in the meadows by the river from coming into the town.

You will pass the Salvation Army building which was once the Town Library and originally built as the Quaker Meeting Place. At the road junction, opposite on the left is **WADE-WRIGHT COURT** on the site where Wade-Wright's manufactured ice-cream for sale in their market place ice-cream parlour.

3. At the Lighthouse turn into **PARADISE ROAD**. Known ironically as "the road to Paradise" because the gallows were sited at the top of the road near the church. At the corner there is a small aluminium plaque on the wall paying tribute to the Far East Prisoners of War (1942-1945).

Opposite, **NELSON AVENUE** commemorates Horatio Nelson's legendary schooldays in the town. However, the connection is unlikely to be true. It originated with Captain George Manby, inventor of the ship to shore rescue apparatus later developed into the breeches buoy. The young Manby attended school in Downham but was six years younger than Nelson who was known to be at school elsewhere. He probably claimed the schoolboy friendship in order to boost his own reputation and gain sponsorship for his inventions at a time when Nelson was a national hero.

4. As you walk up Paradise Road you pass the old Board School, built in 1871 which served the town for over 100 years. It stands next to the new Methodist Church which united the Mount Tabor, Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist congregations. **WESLEY CLOSE** lies at the back of the church, named after John and Charles Wesley cofounders of Methodism.

Opposite the **THE HOLLIES CAR PARK** - formerly the site of two Maltings, a tannery and a house, with extensive gardens, named The Hollies. It was once a private preparatory school run by the Misses Mumford.

Further up Paradise road you pass **OLD BREWERY LANE** at the side of the former St Edmund's Brewery. At the Town Council Offices pause to read the interesting Information Board at the entrance to the car park.

At the junction, on the left, just past the C17th coaching inn the **CASTLE HOTEL**, is **CANNON SQUARE**. The name is derived from a cannon once situated in front of Cannon House with two smaller cannons in entrance to the Castle Hotel. The area was formerly known as Hogg Hill (the pig market).



Cannon House



Castle Hotel

5. As you walk along **HIGH STREET** imagine it in the 1960s before the construction of the inner bypass in Church Road. It was the main A10; the main high road from King's Lynn to London with two way traffic of cars and lorries edging their way along the narrow street. The northern end was previously known as North Gate and the southern end as Regent Street.

As you walk towards the Clock you pass **COFFEE POT MEWS** The Coffee Pot Tavern which stood here was popular for cock fighting events. Evelyn Murrell of the WRAF, who died in 1918 was daughter of the tavern owner. Her name was omitted from the war memorial until 2015 when it was belatedly added due to local pressure.

At **SOUNDING ALLEY** note the wall plaque. In the C18th – C19th there were high walls on both sides of the alley and flagstones on the ground – ideal for testing the sound of bells made in the bell foundry in Church Road.

Next to Sounding Alley is **PLAYHOUSE YARD** (under the archway). There was a playhouse here where travelling players performed. It was later used as a public hall until the opening of the Town Hall

6. The **TOWN SQUARE** formerly known as Market Hill where the market was held until 2004 when it moved to the Town Hall car park in Bridge Street. This is now a gathering place for small outdoor events. The modern drinking fountain reflects the style of the ancient town pump which stood on this site before the introduction of piped water to all homes.



Town pump c.1918



Drinking Fountain today



[\town](#) Clock

The Victorian Clock. The octagonal tower is made of cast iron with a rectangular clock chamber topped by a weather vane. Presented to the town in 1878 by local draper, grocer and clothier, James Scott at a cost of £450. His initials can be seen on the weather vane.

The western edge of the Town Square is dominated by the Town Hall which was built by the Downham Market Town Hall Company Ltd and opened in 1888.

7. Beyond the Town Hall, the carpark is closed on Fridays and Saturdays when it is given over to the town's ancient market. Across the Market Place your route leads through **WALES COURT**. Look at the inscription on the wall which records that here was the former residence of 4 generations of the Wales family who gave more than 200 years of service to the town as medical practitioners. The court fills what used to be the splendid gardens of the Wales family home and surgery.
8. At High Street walk towards the junction with Priory Road and **RAMPANT HORSE LANE**, previously known as Church Way. The building on the corner was formerly The Rampant Horse public house.
9. **PRIORY ROAD**. There is no evidence of a priory having ever been established in Downham Market but the road was probably named after the C17th **Priory House** which is one of the oldest properties in the town. Pause to read the information Board in **Priory Gardens**



Priory House

Priory Road was formerly known as Parson's Lane where a beautiful carrstone rectory once stood on the site of Tesco's stood on the site of Tesco's



The old Rectory

Opposite, the old building was built as a Zionist Chapel and has been used by a school and the Salvation Army and is now a flower shop.

ST WINNOLD'S CLOSE, formerly a meadow and fair field . Named after St. Winnold's Horse fair which was held from the 3rd day of March (St Winnold's Day) with three days of merry-making. It was the 3rd largest horse fair in Europe. In 1914 it is recorded that there were 400 horses fetching £30 - £40 each.

An ancient rhyme about the saint days of March goes

“ First come David, then come Chad,
Then come Winnold roaring mad”

PRIORY TERRACE leading back to Bridge Street was built in 1903. The wrought iron railings reflect the Art Nouveau style of decorative arts in that period. They were removed during World War Two as part of the war effort and restored in more recent times.

Finally you return to Discover Downham.



Discover Downham Market's Street Names Map

