



A HISTORY AND GUIDE TO SUFFOLK.

FOLLOWING the collapse of the Roman Empire in the early fifth century lowland Britain was settled by a succession of folk, predominantly Angles and Saxons, emigrating from what is now northern Germany and Denmark. By the sixth century what we now call England (land of the Angles) was a series of separate Kingdoms each with its own royal dynasty. What is now Suffolk formed the southern half of the Kingdom of East Anglia ruled by the Wuffinga dynasty.

Although the East Anglian kingdom features little in the literature of the 'Dark Ages', archaeology is beginning to reveal that it was probably one of the wealthiest kingdoms of England with well-established trading links. Most of the kingdom's most important Anglo-Saxon sites lie in Suffolk.

Early ('Pagan') Anglo-Saxon period (5th - 7th century AD):-

Remains of settlements from this period have only been found in the river valleys and light soil areas. West Stow is the only fully excavated settlement in the region and one of only a handful in the whole country.

Much of what is known about early Anglo-Saxon Suffolk is based on cemetery finds, when pre-Christian communities buried their dead with their personal possessions.

Burials of the local aristocracy, if not royalty, have been found under mounds at Sutton Hoo and Snape, and excavations are currently being undertaken at both sites. Many ordinary 'village' cemeteries have been found and new ones are coming to light regularly such as that excavated at Westgarth Gardens, Bury St Edmunds in 1972. Finds from these sites can be seen at the County's museums.

The Middle and Late Saxon Period (7th - early 11th century):-

Suffolk as part of the Kingdom of East Anglia, began to be converted to Christianity after c.630, when King Sigbert requested help from Rome and was sent Bishop Felix who established his see at Domnoco (probably the present-

day Dunwich). Monasteries were soon founded around the kingdom - at Blythburgh and Icanho (Iken) around 654 and Ely (673). Over 50 churches were dedicated in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom before the Danish incursions of the ninth century but little else is known about them.

There are hardly any remains of Anglo Saxon architecture above ground in Suffolk largely because all buildings were constructed in wood, until the 11th century when some churches were rebuilt in stone. There are a few pre Norman square towers with long and short work eg. Claydon and round towers built in coursed rubble eg. Thorington.

The majority of early Anglo-Saxon settlements were deserted in the seventh century in favour of new sites and there was a considerable expansion of the population onto the heavier soils of central Suffolk. excavated at Brandon and Burrow Hill, Butley. Ipswich with unbroken occupation from the early 7th century to the present day, has been called 'the first English town'. It grew to cover 125 acres (50ha) by the middle of the 9th century and was a major 'industrial' centre and international port.

Little is known of the late 8th and early 9th century history of the kingdom. It fell under Mercian control in the late 8th century and under that of Wessex in the early 9th century. It was again independent when the Danes landed in 865 and executed King Edmund in 869 at Haegelisdun, now believed to be seven miles south east of Bury St Edmunds where his body was finally laid to rest around 903. By the time of the Norman Conquest all of Suffolk's major towns and most of its present-day villages were already in existence.

While, as explained, there are few remains above ground of the Anglo-Saxon period in Suffolk, a number of places evocative of the period, by historical association, and with later monuments, are well worth a visit, including Blythburgh, Dunwich and Bury St Edmunds (abbey ruins). Museums containing important Anglo-Saxon finds from the County are located in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Woodbridge.

CASTLES OF SUFFOLK:-

So peaceful is the Suffolk Coast and Countryside that it is hard to imagine a time when it was the scene of conflict, revolt and repression. The area's heritage of castles, some still standing up proudly, others in various states of ruin, bears ample witness to this more turbulent era.

Following the Castle Trail:- The complete trail covers some 40 miles and can be completed in a day. However all of the towns have much to offer and so will

reward a leisurely exploration, that you are recommended to take rather longer.

Bungay and Mettingham Castles are close enough to be visited on foot or by bike. Framlingham and Orford are both on the signed Suffolk Coastal Cycle Route and this makes an attractive 2-3 day cycle tour, while Eye Castle and Wingfield are included in the 'Cycling around Eye' leaflet.

Bungay Castle - The original castle, a mound castle, was raised by William de Noyers in 1070 after he was granted the town of Bungay by King William, as a reward to a faithful conquest follower. It passed in 1103 to Roger Bigod and to Hugh 'the bold' Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, in 1120. Frequently in armed dispute with Henry 11, Hugh fortified his castle strongly, building a massive keep some 90 feet in height in about 1165 so that he could defy the King with impunity from his castle at Bungay.

Hugh was finally brought to heel in 1174 and Henry ordered the destruction of Hugh Bigod's strong-hold; the remains of the tunnel dug to achieve this can still be seen at the foot of the great keep. Payment of a thousand-mark fine by Hugh halted the work. A later Bigod, another Roger, carried out further works in 1294 when he raised the massive curtain walls and gate towers which still remain today.

The castle survived various attempts to destroy it, but once life became more peaceful in the late middle ages, it was abandoned and a considerable volume of the stone (a scarce commodity in East Anglia) was carried off over the centuries to build and rebuild houses in the town. The surviving towers are still impressive however, and a Visitor Centre to explain the history of the castle and the Town will be built adjacent to the castle shortly.

The town has a beautiful setting in a loop of the River Waveney. Among the many buildings are the 18th Century Butter Cross in the market place and the church of St. Mary together with adjacent ruins of Bungay Priory. The church was the scene of a terrifying visit by Black Shuck, the legendary 'Hound from Hell', at the height of a violent thunderstorm during a church service in 1577.

Mettingham Castle: Mettingham Castle is a complex of medieval buildings dating from 1342. It is privately owned and only open to visits on a limited number of days through the 'Invitation to View' scheme. However, the impressive gatehouse and north wall can be viewed from Castle Road. The Bigod Way walking trail offers a waymarked route from Bungay Castle to Mettingham Castle, a round trip of 5 miles.

Wingfield Castle:- The remains of the medieval Castle are surrounded by a moat together with a 16th century house. The Castle was built in 1385 by

Michael De La Pole, first Earl of Suffolk. The property is in private ownership and there is no public access, but it can be viewed from Wingfield Green, on the Wingfield-Syleham Road.

Within a mile of the castle is Wingfield College, which is open to visit at weekends, and also through the 'Invitation to view' scheme. A medieval hall with a Palladian facade, it also offers exhibitions of art and sculpture. The adjacent Church has the fine tombs of the De La Pole family.

Eye Castle: Standing on the only high ground in north Suffolk. Eye Castle is a lasting reminder of Suffolk's long and varied history. It was William Malet one of the Conqueror's magnates who built the simple motte and bailey castle. In 1173 the castle was attacked by the notorious Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk (builder of Bungay Castle). This attack failed but the castle had to be rebuilt and it was at this time, around 1182, after the rebuild, that it was probably at its peak. The Castle had close associations with Royalty since the Norman Conquest in 1066 and was probably used as a defensive site for many centuries before that.

William Malet's son founded Eye Priory and in Henry VI's reign the Castle followed the priory into disuse, though not entirely, for a windmill stood on the motte from before 1690 until the early 19th century.

Now, rather than dominating the surrounding area with military might, the Castle offers a tranquil setting for quiet relaxation. The great splendour of Eye today, is the outstanding church with its hundred foot high tower. Within this small town there are a number of other attractive, historic buildings and streets, which can be well appreciated by following the way-marked town trail.

Framlingham Castle:- Viewed from the west from College Road this is everyone's idea of how a castle should look, the battlements rising impressively from the castle mound and reflected in the calm waters of the mere - especially evocative in evening sunlight.

The Castle was built in the 12th century by the Bigod family as part of the Norman subjugation of East Anglia. The impressive curtain wall with its thirteen towers can be walked and gives wonderful views over Framlingham and the surrounding countryside. Much of the interior of the castle was demolished in the 16th Century. Part of the interior remains as a local museum, the Lanman Museum, where you can find out about Framlingham's long history.

Framlingham Castle was subsequently used for a variety of purposes - prison,

poorhouse and school. It was here that Mary Tudor heard that she had become Queen after the death of her brother Edward VI.

The town is an absolute gem, and well worth exploring - in particular, the church with its unique array of monuments to the great families who were associated with Framlingham in its heyday and are buried here. These monuments comprise some of the finest renaissance stone carving to be found in any English country church.

Orford Castle:- Very different from any of the other castles on this trail, Orford Castle consists only of the central keep of the Norman Castle: all the surrounding buildings have disappeared. A most striking keep it is however, with three massive towers rising almost 100 feet above the coastal village of Orford on a small natural hillock. Inside, there is a maze of rooms to explore. Orford Castle was built in the 12th Century to assure the defence of this part of the East Coast. No doubt the wonderful outlook over the coastline and Orfordness are a result of the need for a clear view of any invaders. It was still in use as an observation point as late as World War 2.

As well as enjoying other aspects of Orford - notably its harbour, its seafood and its coastal walks - you can if so inclined follow up your tour of Orford Castle with visits to an interesting variety of more recent defensive structures.

Orfordness, accessible by ferry from Orford, has some weird and wonderful installations dating from the years of the Cold War when it was used for weapons testing and later, as an electronic intelligence centre. The daily number of visits is limited and advance booking with the National Trust is recommended.

Bawdsey, a little further south, presents a variety of defensive sites: Martello Towers from the Napoleonic War (also seen at Aldeburgh and Felixstowe), and defences from both the First and Second World Wars. The Royal Air Force only recently vacated its base at Bawdsey, and much of the development work on radar was undertaken at Bawdsey Manor.