

Sudbury

Trail Details

Distance: 5½ km / 3½ miles
Duration: 2-3 hours
Parking: Kingfisher Leisure Centre

Sudbury offers an excellent mix of fine inns and hotels, shops and cafés, combined with an equally splendid range of cultural and sporting facilities.

Market Hill is home to a number of fine buildings including the old Corn Exchange. One of its many winding lanes leads on to Gainsborough's House, now a fascinating gallery and exhibition dedicated to the life and work of Thomas Gainsborough and other artists. A trip down Quay Lane ends at the luminary Quay Theatre and the Granary.

Mostly, though, just feast your senses on the beautiful setting. Not only was the Stour Valley home to Constable and Gainsborough, the meadows around Sudbury are the oldest continuously grazed land in England; an earthly paradise with its many footpaths and wonderful walks.

The walk:

By the early 14th century Sudbury was one of England's wealthiest towns, largely thanks to the woollen industry. By the 15th century wealthy clothiers controlled the making of woollen cloth, and spent some of their wealth on building fine timber-framed houses, and rebuilding and decorating churches.

By the 1520s religious conflicts disrupted continental markets. However, Sudbury's spinners and weavers turned to producing lighter fabrics.

This walk leads you through the bustling town with its historic buildings and ancient streets, into Sudbury Meadows. Return along the wooded Valley Walk, a haven for wildlife.

1 St Peter's Church and Market Hill

By the 15th century Market Hill was surrounded by timber-framed merchants' houses – shop facades often conceal original timber framework, for example 23-24 and 28. Bear left into Friars Street.

2 Buzzards Hall – No 17 Friars Street

A 15th century merchant's house, extensively remodelled in the 17th century. Continue to Priory Gate – late 15th century gatehouse of the Dominican Priory. Turn right into School Street, left into Straw Lane, and right up Plough Lane to the junction with Stour Street. Turning left you will see a row of 15th century timber-framed cloth merchants' houses.

3 Salters Hall (far end of the row)

The timber studwork demonstrates its owner's wealth. A fine oriel window has delicate tracery and carvings of an elephant and lion with St James the Less, patron saint of fullers – his 'golf club' is the stick used to beat the cloth. Continue down Mill Hill, bearing left into Cross Street.

4 70-78 Cross Street

The three cottages and the house on the right (75-78) were acquired by Abraham Griggs, a say maker, in 1695. He used the cottages as a factory, manufacturing lighter fabrics – Royal Navy bunting made here may have fallen into rebel hands in the War of Independence and been used for the first 'stars and stripes'. 70-74 were weavers' cottages built in the late 1860s by the Kemps, local silk manufacturers. Handloom weavers worked in the first floor rooms with the large windows. Return along Cross Street into Mill Hill, turn left to the Mill.

5 Mill Hotel

In the early mediaeval period fulling was done in open pits on Fullingpit Meadows – later, mills used water-driven hammers to beat the cloth. Turn right behind the mill along the footpath above Fullingpit Meadows – land on the right was once used as tenterfields. Pass the sluice gates, turn right over the bridge and climb up to the church.

6 St Gregory's Church

This 14th / early 15th century church owes much to the wealthy Theobald family whose son, Simon of Sudbury, became Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of England before dying in the Peasants Revolt. John Shorthose, a weaver, left money for benches in the North aisle. The south chapel contains the tomb of clothier and local benefactor Thomas Carter.

Leave the churchyard by the east gate, cross Gregory Street, bear right into Church Walk and down Weavers Lane, noting the early Victorian silk mill at the junction with Gainsborough Street. Turn left to Market Hill.

* If you wish to explore further, the dotted route takes you across the Sudbury Commonlands to Brundon with its ancient hall and mediaeval fulling mill. Where the footpath divides, take the right fork and continue up between the lake and the hall. Past the cottages, turn left onto Brundon Lane and then bear right to return along the Valley Walk.

