

FROM HARFORD
TO
BOWTHORPE

WALK

THE
YARE VALLEY



3rd
Edition

THE YARE VALLEY WALK

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HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE

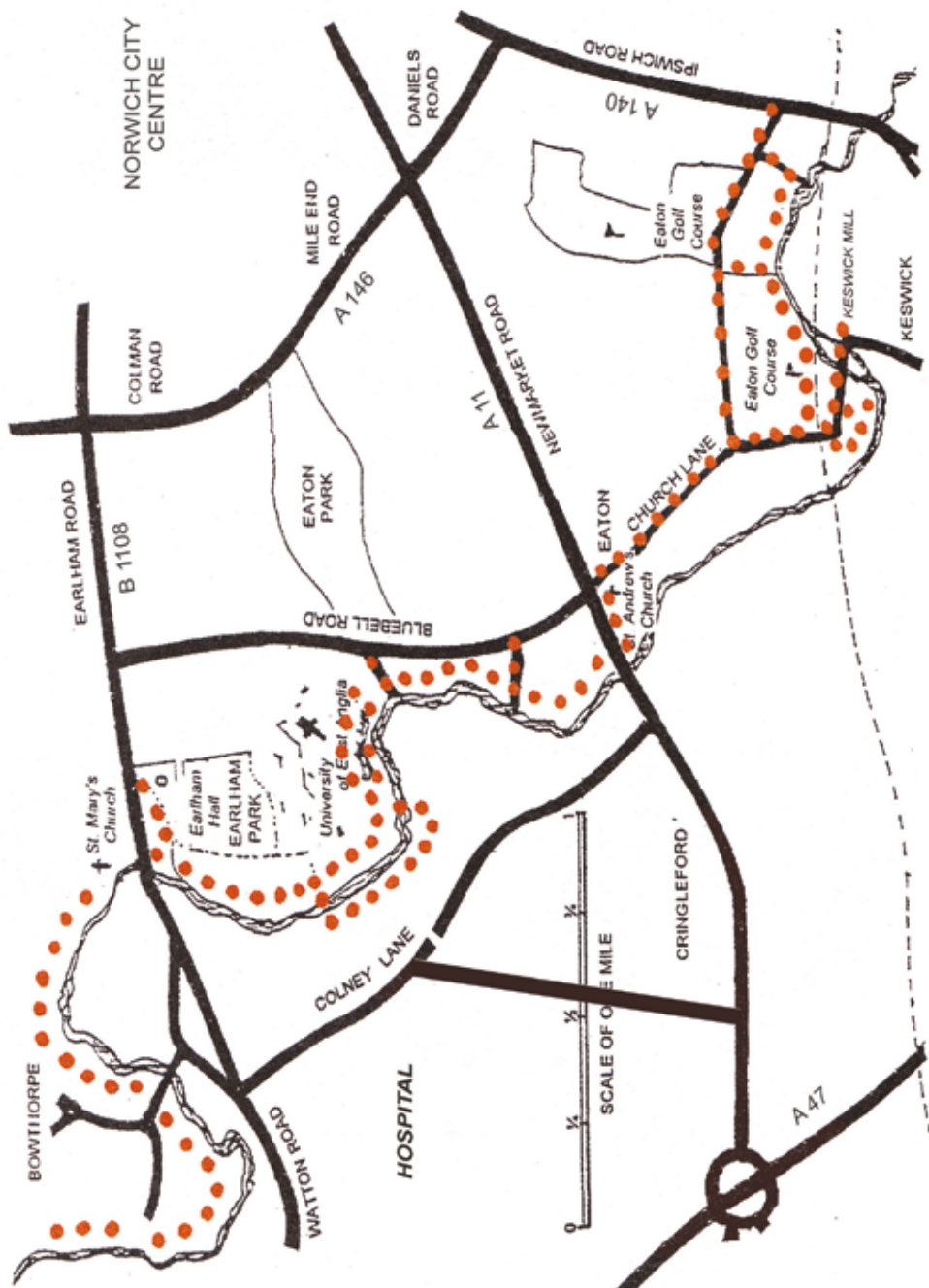
Tom Williamson, Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia

The distinctive features of the landscape of the Yare valley between Harford Bridge and Bawburgh are born both of natural topography and of past patterns of land use. In medieval times the light, well-drained loams of the valley sides would largely have been farmed in 'open fields': that is, the land of each farmer would have comprised a large number of small, unhedged strips, intermixed with those of his neighbours. In some areas of Norfolk such fields were enclosed by Parliamentary act, usually in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, but here they tended to disappear earlier, through piecemeal enclosure. Some open fields still survived at Earlham, for example in the 1640s, but most had long been enclosed, to judge from the size of the huge pollards, originally hedgerow trees, growing in Earlham Park. No trace of open arable survived in the parish by the end of the eighteenth century.

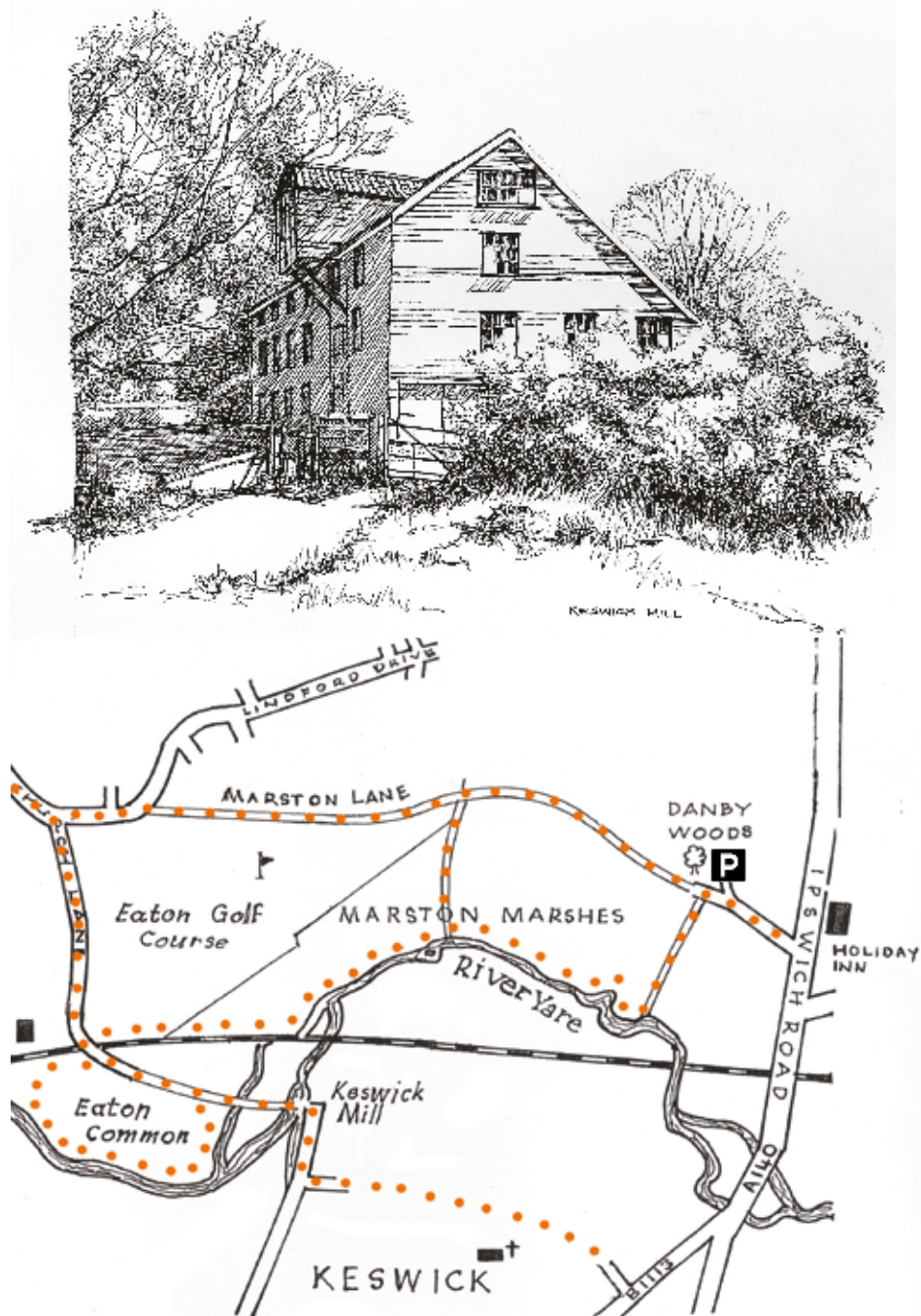
The wide, level valley floor provided rich pasture and meadow land. The grazing marshes were doubtless always valued by local farmers, and since medieval times were improved by cutting drainage dykes, which served to lower the water table and remove flood water. From the seventeenth century the rich grassland was increasingly used to fatten bullocks, brought by drovers from Ireland and Scotland. Mr Aldrich of Eaton, for example, was buying 'Irish Steeres' and 'Scottish Steeres' at Horsham St Faiths Fair in the 1660s and grazing them on the nearby marshes.

Farming is not the only activity to shape the landscape of the valley. In the eighteenth century it became fashionable for gentlemen to surround their homes with extensive parks, of grass and scattered trees: these were a feature of the area around Norwich, a fashionable place to reside. The great park at Earlham, now a public park, was created by the Bacon family, and added to by the Gurneys. Colney Park probably came into existence when a new Colney Hall, in a commanding hilltop position, was erected by John Patteneson around 1770.

THE YARE VALLEY WALK



THE YARE VALLEY WALK



The path leaves the Ipswich Road at Marston Lane, opposite the Holiday Inn Hotel. This lane is an undulating footpath and cycleway, which continues through to join Church Lane, Eaton. At the south-eastern end is a small car park and the Danby Wood Local Nature Reserve, a former chalk working, with a variety of interesting plant and bird life. Marston Lane runs north-west, between Eaton Golf Course and Marston Marshes. The latter are accessible via two gateways on the left. They are managed by the City Council to maintain a variety of marshland and water meadow habitats and, occasionally, a grass snake. A circuit of Marston Marsh can be made on an all-weather pathway suitable for disabled access (car parking is accessed from the Ipswich Road only). This attractive area has grazing animals in drier months, mature willows and poplars, two ponds and a riverside path. In the north west corner a side path leads to a section of the walk running between the railway and the golf course, and thence to a level crossing at the foot of Church Lane.



Keswick Church, photo by John Thurman

A worthwhile diversion, over the railway, leads to Eaton Common and Keswick. Eaton Common is a pleasing riverside meadow with a lightly wooded area fringing the river. Further on, the path goes to Keswick Mill, built in the eighteenth century and working until the 1970s – a prominent building in the landscape. For a further extension to your walk, turn right after the mill and left after about 200 yards into a bridleway which continues to the B1113, giving views of the picturesque Keswick Church with its 12th century round tower. The church itself is accessible, but only from the main road.

THE YARE VALLEY WALK



Otter in the river in Eaton Village, photo by Tom Green



EATON AND CRINGLEFORD

The main Yare Valley Walk continues along Church Lane to St Andrews Church and Eaton Village. There are five churches along or near this walk; all of them of Saxon origin, although the original buildings have long since gone. St Andrews now has a 13th century nave, a 15th century tower and a thatched roof. It is the only remaining thatched church in Norwich. A cleverly contrived new worship area was added in 1992/3.

A gate joins the churchyard to the 'Waitrose' car park and, immediately on the left, is another gate leading to a small area rich in bird life (see page 7) and to Cringleford Bridge, which was built in the 16th century and until 1974 carried the main A11 into Norwich. A few of the buildings of the old village survive in Eaton Street, including the Red Lion Inn which dates from 1643 and an 18th century thatched house by the traffic lights, once the Lamb Inn and now a coffee shop. Across the bridge in Cringleford, the Church of St Peter has an early nave with Saxon features. Note that a church is often found on each side of many important fords on major roads to medieval cities. Here we have St Andrew's and St Peter's on each side of Cringle-Ford on the main road from Norwich to London.

North of the bridge is a small car park and picnic area. From here you can look across to Cringleford Mill House, weir and pool – and get the best view of the old bridge. The path leads from the north west corner of the picnic site, under the flyover (built in 1974), and follows the river for about a mile towards the University lake (The 'Broad').



BIRDING ALONG THE YARE

This part of the Yare Valley can still produce 80 or so bird species a year, in spite of the recent loss of reed, sedge and scrub. Marston Marsh, Eaton Common, Cringleford Marsh and the land behind Bartram Mowers is still the best bird-watching area near Norwich for the common species such as reed warbler, sedge warbler and reed bunting.

For whitethroat, garden warbler, blackcap, chiff-chaff and willow warbler (all summer migrants), the small area between the Waitrose car park and the river can be excellent, while winter thrushes such as redwing and fieldfare often form large flocks on Eaton Common and Marston Marsh. The latter, unfortunately, rarely holds snipe nowadays: not enough cover and too many dogs, but green and great spotted woodpecker often 'dip' over the area. From Cringleford Bridge to 200 yards upstream is a good place to see grey and pied wagtail, little grebe and treecreeper although the best site for grey wagtail is Keswick Mill.



The small but important heronry at Colney hall supplies most of the area's largest birds, while sparrow hawks, which are now seen as often as kestrels, also thrive in the woods alongside the Yare.



Kingfishers can be seen anywhere from Bowthorpe to Harford Bridge. Great crested grebe, common tern (summer) and goosander (winter) are easy to see on the UEA Broad, unlike the chattering redpoll and siskin which need searching for in adjacent trees from November to March.

FLORA ALONG THE VALLEY

A walk along the Yare Valley is a chance to see a significant stretch of what survives of Norfolk's wetlands, most of which have disappeared through agriculture or building. The river, marsh and riverside meadows are relatively unpolluted by fertilizers and pesticides and therefore contain a rich variety of trees, shrubs and wetland plants comprising some 200 species.

Much of the charm of the valley comes from the abundant woodland and many planted trees on the urban edge. The trees include oak, beech, hornbeam, poplar, ash, willow and pine. There are areas of wet woodland with alder and ash containing dog's mercury, water figwort and brooklime. Grazing maintains many common marshland plants in areas where reeds and willow herb would otherwise take over. In Marston Marsh, meadow buttercup, cuckoo flower, marsh marigold, bogbean, quaking grass and marsh cinquefoil survive alongside the striking stands of yellow flag and reedmace. Marsh orchids can be found in flower in May and June on Eaton Common.

Areas of dry grassland within Bowthorpe Marsh contain hawkbit and red bartsia. The river supports a number of aquatic plants including yellow water lily, arrowhead and curled pondweed. The marsh dykes contain celery-leaved buttercup and water violet as well as the occasional water soldier. The grassland on either side of the Yare and University Broad holds an interesting range of meadow plants including a good population of mullein, several species of speedwell, creeping thistle, smooth meadow grass, creeping bent, oxeye daisy, red clover and common vetch. The area immediately upstream from the Broad contains patches of woodland with bluebells, wood anemone and several fern species. Bee orchids, common twayblade and meadow orchids can be found in the adjacent grassy areas.



Overhanging Oak, photo by Alex Allen

CRINGLEFORD TO UEA

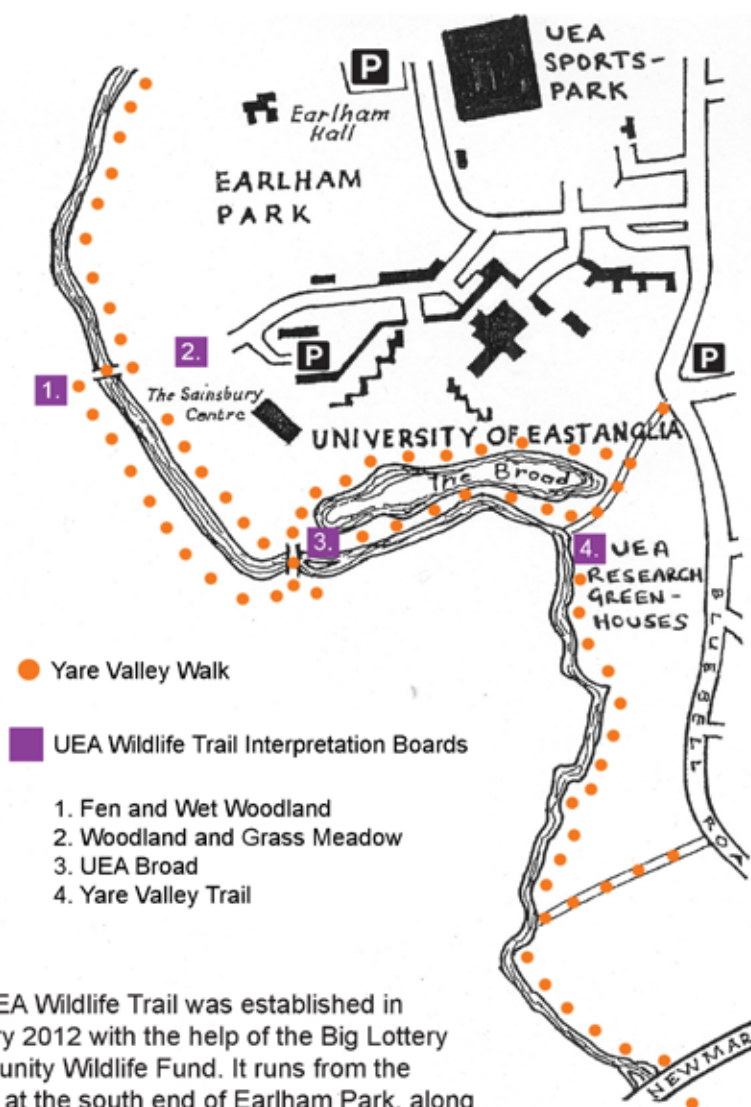
The riverside walk north from Cringleford takes you past some fine chestnut trees to a bend in the river and enters one of the most attractive stretches of the Yare. After a few yards, where the river turns left again, you can either follow the river towards the University of East Anglia (UEA) or take a path running east to Bluebell Road. Continuing on the riverside path, the scene is tranquil, unspoilt, and still recognisable from Percy Lubbock's description of a boat trip here in the late 19th century, in his book 'Earlham' (Jonathan Cape, published 1922).

On the opposite bank is the privately owned Cringleford Carr, an area of boggy woodland which contains a series of canals formed in the 19th century for use by private gondolas. The rare 'spring snowflake' *leucojum vernum* can be seen flowering there in January and February. Further on the right, walking now on boardwalk, are marsh and reed-beds belonging to UEA which has undertaken a number of conservation measures here. Beyond the marsh, on the field on rising ground bordering Bluebell Road, are paddocks for grazing ponies and research glasshouses, also belonging to UEA.

Passing a boarded platform which overlooks a pond (the Water Soldier pond, named after the white flowering plant with spiked leaves which inhabits it), the path joins the perimeter of the UEA Broad. This lake was created from gravel workings in the mid 1970s. There is now a choice between making a detour by following an anticlockwise route around the lake, or continuing on the footpath between lake and river, to the left. Either way, the buildings of the University are obvious: the stepped pyramid-shaped ziggurats are student residences which were designed by Denys Lasdun and built in the mid 1960s when UEA was founded on land which was previously a golf course.

Continuing beside the lake to a footbridge, the unmistakable glass and metal crescent, and beyond it the so-called 'Shed', of the award winning Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts can be seen on the right. This art gallery is the earliest public building designed by Sir Norman Foster and was opened in 1978, with the underground crescent wing added some 12 years later. It contains a public restaurant and gallery housing a world class collection ranging from modern Western art, to artefacts from the ancient world. Well worth a visit if you appreciate Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, or Edgar Degas. Even if you do not, there is a good chance of finding something else of interest in this celebrated building!

UEA WILDLIFE TRAIL



The UEA Wildlife Trail was established in January 2012 with the help of the Big Lottery Community Wildlife Fund. It runs from the woods at the south end of Earlham Park, along the river, round the Broad and through the Yare Valley. There are four interpretation boards, with accompanying leaflet dispensers situated at intervals along the trail, providing a bounty of information about all the plant and animal life you can expect to find here. It is a fantastic addition to the UEA grounds and we strongly recommend a visit!



EARHAM HALL

UEA TO EARLHAM PARK

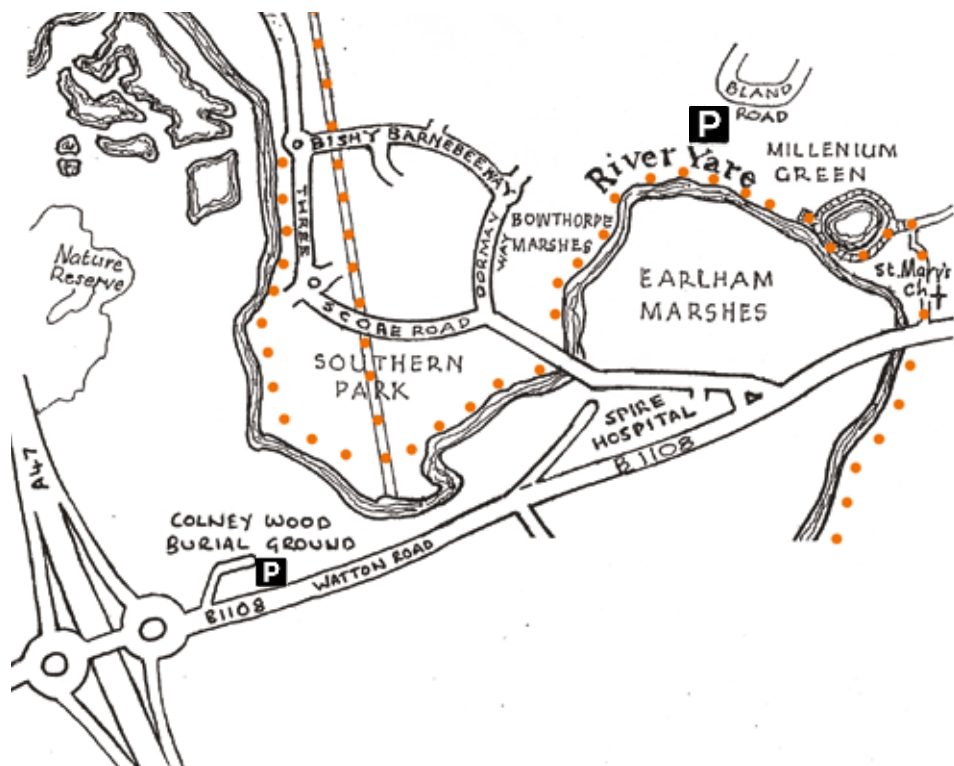
The footbridge over the river, which is modelled on the 'mathematical bridge' at Queens' College Cambridge, leads on the west to a path to Colney Lane and some interesting woodland walks. A few yards north east of the bridge, near the Broad, is a rowan tree, bench and plaque in memory of Elaine Tucker a former chairman of the Yare Valley Society. The Yare Valley Walk itself follows the right (east) bank of the river, beside some tall willows and poplars. If this path is difficult in wet weather, a drier alternative follows the opposite bank, beside sports fields, but you must re-cross the river at the next bridge. To the left are the research institutes of the Norwich Research Park, including the John Innes Institute, one of Europe's leading plant biology centres, and the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, opened in 2002. North of the second bridge, the riverside walk skirts an area of reedbed and marsh (muddy in wet weather) with a woodland belt called The Heronry, beyond. Herons no longer roost here, but do so in nearby Colney Park.



The Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, photo by Peter Huggins

After about half a mile, the path enters the open grassland of Earlham Park, which dates back to the 17th century. Most of the landscaping, and the small red brick dovecote are 18th century. At this point you can cross the B1108 by leaving the Park through a gate in the wire fence, to St Mary's Church on the opposite side. Be careful crossing the road as the speed limit a few yards to your left is still 40 mph. Alternatively, turn right before reaching the dovecote and walk on the grass past the cafe and the front of Earlham Hall. This building has 16th century origins, but the present house has a 17th century front flanked by 18th century bays. For much of its history, Earlham Hall was the home of the Quaker banking family, the Gurneys, and it was where Elizabeth Fry spent her childhood. As it is now part of UEA, the Hall is not open to the public although the gardens to the rear are accessible and contain some fine specimen trees. This route joins University Drive and left into Earlham Road, towards St Mary's Church.

THE YARE VALLEY WALK



EARLHAM BRIDGE TO BOWTHORPE

Parts of this section of the walk are liable to flooding in wet weather, and suitable footwear should be worn.

After crossing the B 1108, the path continues through a gateway to the left of St Mary's Church, near the original village of Earlham (which was probably located in what is now Earlham Park). The present church building dates mainly from the 16th century and contains a 14th century font. It stands above the old ford crossing the river. Behind the church is an early 17th century house now known as Earlham Lodge. Continue past the University residences built in the 1990s, until you reach the Millennium Green.

At the far end of the Green the path turns left, skirting a pond on boardwalk until reaching a gate. Then it follows the bank above the river and Earlham Marshes. The marshes are partially flooded in winter when they attract flocks of geese. At the end of the bank, a gate leads to Bland road, West Earlham, where car parking is available. However, a narrow path immediately left from the gate runs between two hedges, until another left turn brings you into Bowthorpe Marsh (which may be impassable in wet weather) with its variety of flora. Following the river, the path goes under the road bridge, past the weir and through the Southern Park with glimpses of Colney Church and village across the river, and the new housing at Three Score to the left, until emerging in the Chapel Break part of the Bowthorpe housing development.

After passing the first pond in Southern Park, the path crosses an ancient track way which Archaeological surveys date from late Saxon or medieval times. It is shown on Faden's map of Norfolk (1797) and on early Ordnance Survey maps, as leading from Bowthorpe to the Watton Road at Colney, crossing the river by a ford or bridge. It was in use until the early 20th century. North of the road this becomes a tarmac path and cycleway up to the Bowthorpe shopping centre adjacent to a ruined church, and the mainly 17th century Bowthorpe Hall.



Pony on Earlham Marshes,
photo by Alex Allen

Further west, near the junction of the B1108 with the A47, there are some attractive walks in the woods and escarpment overlooking the river, in the Colney Woodland Burial Ground.

THE YARE VALLEY WALK



Norwich Fringe Project

The Norwich Fringe Project, established in 1990, is a local authority partnership funded countryside management project. The Project's overall aim is: to work with local communities to look after the countryside on their door step. The project's

partners are Norfolk County and Norwich City Councils, Broadland and South Norfolk Councils and the Broads Authority, who all provide funding and support. Covering a 4-mile radius around Norwich, the project looks after and manages a host of countryside sites and open spaces for its funding partners and parish councils. The sites include: woodland, marshes, ponds, heathland, hedgerows and other open spaces. Along the Yare Valley Walk the Project team consisting of a full time Project Officer and Part-time Project Assistant have been involved with the management of a number of important grassland sites. During your exploration of the Yare Valley why not stop off and explore them:

Marston Marshes: a riverside marsh grazed with cattle between May and December. A disabled access path around part of the sides provides a circular walk for all throughout the year. In the spring time look out for the abundance of wildflowers.

Eaton Common: Slightly off the beaten track, well worth a visit. During the spring of 2011 we counted over 100 common marsh orchids.

Earlham and Bowthorpe Marshes: traditionally grazed marshes with horses and cattle. Great for wildlife throughout the seasons, look out for the winter wading birds and wildfowl on Earlham Marshes, while spring birds, including warblers, can be heard through the three sites, not to forget the spring and summer wildflowers.

If you are interested in the work of the Project and want to find out more please contact the Project Officer: Phone: 01603 423303 Mb: 07733102013
Email: fringe.ncc@gt.net.gov.uk or www.Norwichfringeproject.co.uk



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THE YARE VALLEY SOCIETY

The Yare Valley Society, founded in 1968, now has about 400 members. The Society aims to protect the valley south of Norwich, principally between Harford and Bowthorpe, against any development which will detract from its natural beauty, and to encourage any development which will preserve its outstanding landscape value for the benefit of all.

We are routinely consulted by local and statutory authorities about planning applications, comment on many planning issues every year, and have given evidence at numerous public enquiries. We hold annual meetings with a guest speaker and other occasional events.

This Guide, first produced as a Millennium project, is now in its third edition.

For further details, see www.yarevalleysociety.org or contact, the Membership Secretary, 42 Bluebell Road NR4 7LG
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