Saxmundham is an historic market town set in the valley of the river Fromus, a tributary of the Alde. The town name is thought to derive from the Saxon ‘Seizmond’s Home’. The earliest recorded mention of Saxmundham is in the Domesday Survey of 1086 which mentions three churches.

Saxmundham’s jewel, sometimes called a hidden gem, is its Museum (1). Entry is free, so don’t pass up a chance to visit. Opened in 2004, it contains many interesting local artefacts and exhibits including a 19th century printers shop, small cinema, period dress shop, an original bakery and a reference room. You can find out about Saxmundham’s very own sports car manufacturer! The Museum also offers a presentation of photographs, videos and oral histories.

**Market Place**

On leaving the Museum turn right and then bear right into Market Place (2), a venue for traders for centuries. The oldest building is the 16th century former Angel Inn, which has a timber frame and a medieval window under the eaves.

In the entrance to the Market Place car park is the old town pump, cast by Garretts of Leiston and given to the town by the Long family in 1838. At the other end of Market Place is Old Bank House, Saxmundham’s first bank which was built by Gurneys in the early 19th century. Behind this is Wingfield House, thought to be as old as the Angel Inn.

Passing The Bell Hotel on the left, go along Station Approach up to the site of the Railway Station.
Railway Station

(3) The Railway reached Saxmundham in 1859, and included a goods yard, signal box and a footbridge. The station, whose frontage includes a wall mounted Victorian post box, was badly damaged by fire in February 2018. In 1910 the station employed more than 20 people!

A branch line served industrial Leiston and the holiday resorts of Thorpeness and Aldeburgh.

The nearby Town Council Office, formerly the Police Station, was built on the site of the town gas works which closed in the late 1960s.

Albion St to Chantry House

Across the railway line in Albion Street is a row of cottages built to house railway employees. The old Victorian Police Station opposite, now a private dwelling, still has its cells. Continue to the top of Albion Street noting the flint cottages on the right.

On reaching the top of Albion Street, bear right and then turn left into Rendham Road. There you will see in front of you the grey brick roundhouse of the old Post-mill (4) which worked until 1907 and is now converted into a private house. The earliest map showing a mill on this site is dated 1824 but there was probably a mill here long before then. The Post-mill was the most common type in Suffolk, and originally built entirely of timber. It was heightened to 51ft to the roof ridge when surrounding buildings obstructed the wind, making it one of the tallest in Suffolk.
At this stage you can either carry along Rendham Road and turn left into the top of Mill Road, or return to the top of Albion Street and take the steps leading down to Mill Road, thought to have been constructed as an access to the water pump which stood at the bottom on the right. There is another interesting flint cottage at the bottom of the steps.

Turn left along Mill Road and over the railway line into Chantry Road. Chantry Cottages on the right are early 18th century timber framed cottages. The adjoining Chantry House was built in 1850 on the site of a much older house. The Chantry is reputed to have been connected with the Wingfield and De Pole families. On the other corner note the unusual gable end of No. 1 High Street, the ornate gables, some of Dutch style, some with crow steps, and S-shaped roof plates which are common in Suffolk - look for more in the Market Place.

**South Entrance**

Turn right at the crossroads into South Entrance. In front of the Chantry is the town sign (5), erected in 2003, depicting Suffolk sheep and cattle, the parish church, market hall and on top a crown to commemorate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee (look out for the other town sign in North Entrance). Further along South Entrance notice the unusual frontage of Patmore’s shop (previously a wine shop for over 100 years), and opposite the old driveway to Hurts Hall, home of the Long family until 1957, and patrons to the town since 1716 (the hall is best viewed from the main road.
leading south out of the town). Further along on the right is an impressive three story house built in Suffolk yellow brick in the early 19th century with Greek Doric portico. The three story house nearby is much older being 17th century timber framed and plaster. It was probably refronted when the larger house was built.

Monks Cottages

Further out of town on the right are Monks Cottages (6), which are undoubtedly some of the oldest dwellings in Saxmundham. Note the panelled pargetting in a checker pattern, a reproduction probably of the original 17th century pargetting. Close by can be found the Victorian mail box and Park Cottage, where in 1858 the artist Henry Bright (1810–1873) and his family lived.

Monks Cottages featured in the BBC TV programme ‘House Detectives’, where it was discovered that the buildings were once a single house, perhaps associated with the nearby Chantry.

The Parish Church

Return to the crossroads. Turn right into Church Street - carry on over the river Fromus to the Parish Church (7) of St John the Baptist. The Church is said to be built on the site of an earlier Saxon Church and has portions dating from 1250.

There is an octagonal font, used for baptisms for hundreds of years, featuring a carved pedestal with figures of woodwoses.
Wander round the churchyard and on the Eastern boundary note the row of thatched cottages. These were built by the Long family as a single storey church school in 1836.

Forty years later a second floor was added as a library and reading room. The buildings were later converted into four tied cottages for estate workers and are now private homes.

Retrace your steps around the tower. Situated south-west of the tower is a unique headstone incorporating a sundial, in memory of John and Mary Noller (1725 and 1724). Also search for the large stone tomb of the Thurlow family (on the left as you leave the churchyard) including Thomas Thurlow (1813–1899) the sculptor.

Fromus Square

On leaving the Church cross the river Fromus. Due to water table changes, it’s hard now to imagine Saxmundham’s early settlers navigating up the river!

On your right is the Waitrose supermarket, the former site of the livestock market which closed in 1987. Saxmundham’s first market charter was granted in 1272 by King Edward I to John De Ramsey, Lord of the Manor.

Opposite was the site of the Playhouse Cinema, opened in 1934 but sadly closed in 1962. Cross the car park and around the side of the supermarket into Fromus Square (8). Opened in 2004, the square is a pleasant resting place and site of the War Memorial.
The High Street

Leave Fromus Square by the 17th century White Hart pub (with tall 19th century octagonal chimney stacks) and turn right into the High Street. The whole of the High Street is a conservation area, many of the buildings being Tudor wood-frame with Victorian brick facades.

Buildings on the High Street include Jackey L the jewellers shop, formerly Kerseys, established in 1769 by Jerome Bright. This was once the site of the town gaol and the original cell door is on display at the Museum. Look at the thickness of the walls of H G Crisp, the stationers and booksellers, est 1834, showing evidence of the brick facade. Estate agents Flick & Son, est 1833, occupy Ashford House, thought to have orginally been an inn. A roman lamp was found here in 1967.

Market Hall (9) was built as a Corn Exchange in 1846. William Long helped to complete it when the original investors ran out of money! His family crest tops the hall.

The Bell Hotel (10) was rebuilt in 1842 after a previous inn had been destroyed by fire. It provided horses for the stage and mail coaches that ran from London to Yarmouth. Carrying on up the High Street, on the left you will see an example of a Suffolk crinkle-crankle wall, opposite a building which once housed Wells the ironmongers, est c1830. Beyond this is the former GPO Telephone Exchange (11) completed in 1954. The town sign was erected in 2000 and includes a ‘dove of peace’ to commemorate 50 years since the end of World War II.
North Entrance

Pass under the railway bridge into North Entrance. Several interesting architectural features can be seen here. Lynwood House has a Gothic fanlight; The Beeches, a parapet, stone coping and an attractive door surround; 17th century Varley House, carved doorway. Further on the right is the Doctors’ Surgery which occupies the site of the former annual Lamb Sale and Hiring Fairs. Brook Cottage (on the left with ornate barge boarding) is believed to have been a school run by Owen Haxell and attended by artist Henry Bright and the sculptor Thomas Thurlow.

The entrance to the Carlton Hall estate, once the family home of Richard Garrett III of the Leiston Works, was roughly where Brook Farm Road is now. The hall was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day in 1939 and much later rebuilt as private apartments. The original coach house and servants’ quarters remain.

An interesting detour can be taken by entering Carlton Park Sports field, walking across the playing fields and on to the remote parish church of St Peter, where Richard Garrett and members of his family are buried. The rebuilt Carlton Hall can be seen across the fields.

As you return to town, if you have any questions please call in at the Museum or send us an email at the address below.

Entrance to the Museum is free, but please support us by leaving a donation.

If you’re a member of a group or club and would like to arrange a visit to the Museum, please contact us.

This edition of the town trail is produced by Saxmundham Museum, based on previous versions by the Local History Society.  April 2020

Saxmundham Museum, 49 High Street, Saxmundham IP17 1AJ
www.SaxmundhamMuseum.org.uk  email: info@saxmundhammuseum.org.uk
SAXMUNDHAM

1. Museum
2. Market Place, old Angel Inn and town pump
3. Railway Station
4. Old Post-mill tower
5. Town sign and Chantry
6. Monks Cottages

7. Parish Church
8. Fromus Square
9. High Street and Market Hall
10. Bell Hotel
11. Town sign and old P.O.

NOTE: Parking restrictions may apply in the supermarket car parks.