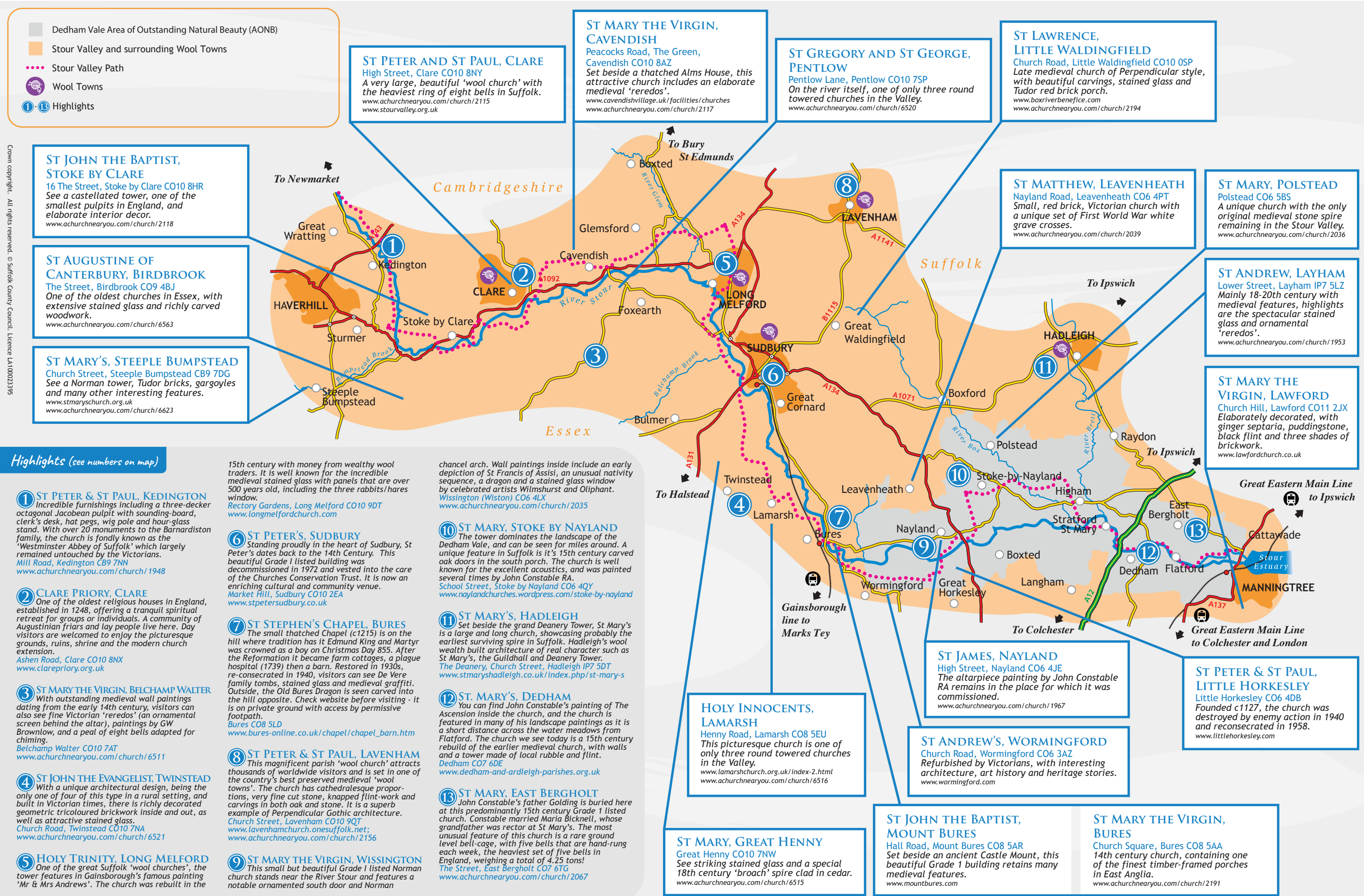


CHURCHES in The Stour Valley



Crown copyright. All rights reserved. © Suffolk County Council. Licence LA100023395

STOUR VALLEY CHURCHES

– PAST & PRESENT

The heritage of Stour Valley churches
The gentle valley slopes and meandering river are central to the stunning landscape in the Stour Valley, whilst the area's built heritage also has a huge impact. Across the Valley church towers and steeples have been used as landmarks for generations. For hundreds of years, churches in the Stour Valley have been at the heart of the community, bringing people together and reflecting local industries. Giving a window into the past, some date back to early medieval times, some showcase how strong faith and great prosperity built many 'wool churches' - exceptionally large and magnificent churches with lavish architecture - while others mark significant historical milestones such as Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Visitors from near or far are invited to experience the beautiful landscapes and charming towns and villages, admire incredible architecture and artworks, find a dragon and join a cultural event. With so much to explore, walking and cycling offer fabulous ways to discover the Churches in the Stour Valley. The Suffolk Historic Churches Trust began in 1983 what is now a national one-day sponsored cycle ride each autumn, so you can *Ride and Stride* your way around the Stour Valley.

Round tower churches are a feature across East Anglia, and the Stour Valley has a few fabulous examples in Lamarsh, Little Bradley and Pentlow. The purpose of round towers has been a matter of debate with many believing they were originally defensive towers, while others argue they were lookout towers, or beacons.



In the 16th century, the Reformation brought significant changes to the region's religious buildings and saw the destruction of many religious symbols. Ornate roodcreens were painted over and saintly faces were scratched out. Luckily, some stained-glass windows survived simply because of the vast expense of replacing them with plain glass. Holy Trinity, Long Melford, has one of the best examples of 15th century stained glass windows in the country. Fast forward 300 years and Victorian investment in medieval churches added new elements,

In the 16th century, the Reformation brought significant changes to the region's religious buildings and saw the destruction of many religious symbols. Ornate

decoration and restoration of historic features - a good example of this is the porch at St Andrew's, Wormingford.

The Wool Trade
The Stour Valley is a well-known centre of the medieval cloth and wool trade, and in the 16th century many of the towns were amongst the wealthiest in the country. Much of this wealth was used to build architecturally superior timber framed buildings and churches, giving a distinctive look to the area which attracts visitors today. This textile industry was concentrated along the River Stour and its tributaries, for trading access to the sea, and these significant churches were built along the rivers. Riverside mills processed the wool and locally designed working barges, known as Stour Lighters, navigated the Stour.

Prosperity from the wool trade has left a legacy of magnificent churches which dominate the landscape and often seem to dwarf the settlements they now serve. Rich merchants and gentry, who financed their construction, are commemorated within the buildings in elaborate memorials which also testify to their wealth. In fact, where a parish had several extremely wealthy people, the whole church might be rebuilt, as at Lavenham and Long Melford. High quality and skilled craftsmen were important for the spectacular flintwork, intricate carvings, glorious wall paintings and beautiful stained glass.



Brick-making developed as a local industry (such as at Bulmer). By the 15th century red brick was used in high status secular buildings and can be seen in the external and interior architecture of many churches. The Stour Valley gives some of the finest examples of the Perpendicular style of Gothic architecture, with cathedralesque scale and characteristic design of vertical lines.



Explore More
This guide features a selection of churches in the Stour Valley, each with its own special characteristics and fascinating stories to tell. Please plan ahead and check visiting arrangements to ensure each church is open for you to explore. There is a wealth of information available online about churches in the Stour Valley. The following websites are a good starting point if you're looking to learn more:

- www.simonknott.co.uk
- www.essexchurches.info
- www.angelsandpinnacles.org.uk
- www.achurchnearyou.com
- www.roundtowers.org.uk
- www.shct.org.uk
- www.friendsofsexchurches.org.uk

CHURCHES IN THE STOUR VALLEY

The Stour Valley is a nationally significant area for historic buildings, positioned on the border between Essex and Suffolk - an area sometimes referred to as Constable Country - under an hour by train from London. Soaring 'wool churches' dominate the valley landscape, as strong faith and great prosperity built exceptionally large and magnificent churches with lavish architecture. Each church has a unique story to tell, providing an inspiration to anyone with an interest in the heritage of these rural communities.



VISITING THE STOUR VALLEY



Please consider travelling sustainably where possible. There are good links to the Stour Valley on the Gainsborough rail line between Marks Tey and Sudbury, and there are bus routes throughout the area. For up to date local public transport timetables, contact Traveline on: www.traveline.info or 0871 200 22 33.

For detailed maps of the area, use Ordnance Survey Explorer Map No's. 196 (Sudbury, Hadleigh and the Dedham Vale), 210 (Newmarket and Haverhill), 211 (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) and 195 (Braintree and Saffron Walden).

Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project
Tel: 01394 445225
Email: dedhamvale.project@suffolk.gov.uk
Web: www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org

Leaflet produced August 2020. Improving the Stour Valley for Visitors is a business development project to support high quality visitor products and services, funded by:

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



Front cover image: St Mary, Stoke by Nayland. Back cover image: Holy Trinity, Long Melford © Courtesy of Ian Ibbotson

Churches in THE STOUR VALLEY



Explore the Stour Valley with a series of guides