



Ramsey
Open for Discovery

A brief history of Ramsey

Ramsey grew up around its Abbey, which was founded in 969AD on higher ground within the Fens by Ailwyn, Ealdorman of East Anglia, and Oswald, Bishop of Worcester. The Abbey became one of the most important monastic institutions in England in the 12th and 13th centuries. It was known for its wealth and scholarship and there were about eighty monks in residence. As the Abbey prospered, so Ramsey grew, and by the 13th century it had become a town with a weekly market and an annual three day fair on the feast of St Benedict.

The Dissolution in 1539 brought an end to the Abbey and Ramsey's fortunes declined, only to rise again during the 17th and 18th centuries when the Fens were drained. Many people were drawn to the rich, reclaimed agricultural land, including the Fellowes family, later elevated to the peerage as the Lords De Ramsey.

Both the town and the Abbey have associations with the Cromwells, notably the Lord Protector's uncle, also named Oliver, who remained steadfastly loyal to the Crown. His summer residence was at the Abbey and he is buried along with many other Cromwells, at the parish church of St Thomas a Becket.

The town expanded in the first half of the 19th century, reinforced by the coming of the railways: prior to this, goods had been transported to and from Ramsey by water. Two separate branch lines were built, by rival companies, each with its own station at either end of the town. Plans to link them did not materialise and by the time of railway nationalisation in 1948, both lines had been closed to passenger traffic.

Over the second half of the 20th century Ramsey grew steadily and today has a population of more than 7,500. Its centre has remained largely unaltered and consists of two main streets: the High Street leading to St Thomas a

Becket church and the Great Whyte, an unusually long and wide street.

The centre of Ramsey was designated a Conservation Area in 1975 and 60 properties are included on the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. There are also two scheduled ancient monuments – Ramsey Abbey and Booth's Hill.

Getting there

Located 13 miles SE of Peterborough, 21 miles NW of Ely and 25 miles NW of Cambridge, Ramsey can be reached by road as follows:

- From junction 16 on A1(M), go south along B1043 (old A1). Turn left onto B660 to Ramsey St Mary's. Turn right onto B1040 to Ramsey.
- From A14 junction 23, take the A141 East (signposted to March/Chatteris). Turn left at Warboys on to B1040 to Ramsey.

There are regular bus services from Huntingdon, Peterborough and St Ives. The closest railway stations are Peterborough and Huntingdon.

Great Fen

Ramsey is a gateway to the Great Fen, a developing landscape around two existing nature reserves with the aim of creating a huge wetland area for wildlife and for people. The Great Fen is one of the largest restoration projects of its type in Europe. On Ramsey's doorstep, it is already a haven for wildlife with bird hides and trails for the public to enjoy as well as the Countryside Classroom at Ramsey Heights, where there is a wide range of events and activities, as well as school and adult learning programs.



www.greatfen.org.uk

www.discoverramsey.co.uk

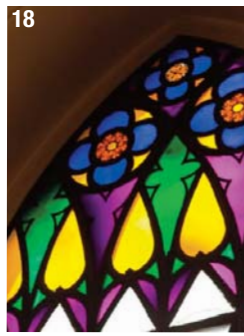
Ramsey
Open for Discovery



Coral Design Management, Peterborough

Historic Town Trail

Approx 3.6km/1¼ miles
1 hr 30mins



Start the trail underneath the **Clock Tower (1)** on Great Whyte. A prominent local landmark, made of cast iron with typical leaf decoration, erected in 1888 as a memorial to the Rt Hon Edward Fellowes, 1st Baron De Ramsey. Nicknamed “The Dummy”, it was renovated by the Town Council in 1988.

The most notable thing about the Great Whyte is its extreme width (80 feet/24.5m) caused by the covering over of High Lode (Bury Brook), which originally ran down the centre as an open waterway and was navigable by small boats.

Leave the clock tower and walk towards the TSB Bank (2) on the left, which was once the town gaol; **continue along the short, narrow section of the Great Whyte** and ahead of you at the junction to the left of the George Hotel is the former **NatWest bank (3)** which straddles the Bury Brook flowing beneath it. This was also the site of the High Bridge, which connected the two halves of the High Street. Note the large golden eagle statue on the **Nationwide Building Society (4)**. This is all that remains of the Eagle Printing Works, which formerly occupied this site.

Cross the High Street to the George Hotel (5), a 17th century inn with a 19th century façade and many original features remaining including a fine staircase and some timber framing. **On leaving the George turn left.**

Continue along the High Street until you reach Salem Baptist Chapel (6). This has an impressive pedimented façade dating from 1857. Internally there is a gallery and original box pews. **Cross the High Street** and look back across the road at the prominent former **Lion Hotel (7)**, with its high level 1731 date plaque, now private flats.

Continue until you reach the Methodist Church (8). Built in 1899 on the site of a former workhouse, the church was damaged in 1942 when German bombs fell on the town. An adjoining house took a direct hit and there were several fatalities in the town.

Retrace your steps and cross over the junction with the Great Whyte and continue east along the High Street. This was originally the southern side of the marketplace until it was built on at the end of the 15th century. **The Angel Public House (9)** dating from the 17th century is on your left. Further along (on left) the building with the protruding iron bracket was the mid 18th century former **Anchor Inn (10)**. On the roof are two unusual medieval ridge tiles of a ram and a bull. These and the unusual louvred chimney pot on the adjoining buildings were possibly salvaged from a major fire in 1731. **Cross the road for a better view of the tiles.** As you cross you will see a building with red-brick detailing, which used to house the post office.

Continue past the Abbey Rooms (11) with its elaborate red-brick detailing reminiscent of chapel architecture. As you reach the end of the High Street the full impact of Abbey Green comes into view.

Crowds of pilgrims used to congregate on Abbey Green before entering the abbey precincts. It was also the site of an annual fair. Nowadays, on most Sundays in June and July you can enjoy listening to band concerts here. Across on your left are the **Almshouses (12)** originally built for twelve poor women in 1839 using stone from the Abbey. Adjoining the almshouses is the former **Church School (13)**, dating from 1848, built in yellow brick. Originally

consisting of a master’s house with the boy’s school on one side and the girl’s on the other, the central bell turret still stands but the bell is missing. **Cross the road to the middle of Abbey Green.**

Abbey Terrace (14) on right is a symmetrical group of gabled dwellings dated 1863. Stone plaques on the façade bear the Fellowes family crest. A little further along is the former vicarage, now **Ramsey Golf and Bowls Club (15)**. **Walk towards the intriguing ruins of the Abbey Gatehouse.**

The **Abbey Gatehouse (16)** is now owned by the National Trust. It dominates the south side of Abbey Green. Only the porter’s lodge now remains of the once magnificent 15th century stone gatehouse. The gateway once spanned the road but was removed by the Cromwells to Hinchingsbrooke House, Huntingdon to form an imposing entrance to their main dwelling. Inside the lodge is a large 13th century effigy believed to be of Earl Ailwyn, one of the founders of the Abbey. The gatehouse (together with the Lady Chapel in the Abbey House) is open to the public on the 1st Sunday of every month from 1.00-5.00 1 April to 31 October.

Today the Gatehouse is also an entrance to Abbey College and **Abbey House (17)**. Although the great Benedictine monastery prospered from its late 10th century origins to become known as ‘Ramsey the Rich’, little of the original building survives. After the Dissolution in 1539, the Abbey was acquired by Sir Richard Williams (alias Cromwell) who had most of the buildings demolished and sold off the stone as building material. Some of the stone was used in the Cambridge colleges (Caius, Kings and Trinity), the towers of several churches including St Thomas a Becket, and many



other buildings. The main fragment of the original abbey still standing is the 13th century Lady Chapel, which was incorporated into a large manor house by the Cromwells during the second half of the 16th century. Since then the house has undergone many changes. It was extended by Sir John Soane in 1804-06, and extensively altered by Blore in 1839. In 1938 after the death of Lady Diana Broughton, its owner, the house became the Abbey School. The house has been part of the school for over 75 years and is now a listed building and a venue for events

***For an impressive view of the house**, a 15 minute diversion from the trail can be made. **Walk past the gatehouse, along Hollow Lane. Turn left into Abbey Road and continue until you can see the school.** At the junction of Hollow Lane and Abbey Road is **Booth's Hill (E)**. This was reputedly a small motte and bailey castle built around 1173 by Geoffrey de Mandeville, after he had occupied the Abbey and expelled the monks. It is now a ruined ice house.

Retrace your steps to the Abbey Green and walk to the Parish Church of St Thomas a Becket (18). Forming a lovely end vista to the High Street, the church dates from about 1180 and is thought to have been built as a hospitum, or guest house to the Abbey. The building was probably converted to a church in around the 13th century. The western church tower was added in 1672, built of stone from the Abbey with the fine original Norman doorway incorporated into its walls. The church has a remarkable 12th century nave considered by many to be the finest in Huntingdonshire, consisting of seven bays. One of the treasures of the church is a 15th century carved oak

lectern on a square stem surmounted by figures of the evangelists.

Leave the church by the churchyard path. Just before reaching the gate on your left, you will see the octagonal base and column of the 14th century churchyard cross. Through the gate on your right is the former **Abbey Stables and Coach House (19)** dating from 1837-1839, now converted into dwellings.

Cross over to Church Green and follow the footpath round the green. On your right is the former **'Spinning' School (20)** for fifty girls with its red brick front and elaborate latticed windows, and an elegant group of houses with tall chimneys, decorative ridge tiles and bargeboards.

Slightly set back is the **Ramsey Abbey Estates Office (21)**. This unusual symmetrical single storey building, in white gault brick with red brick detailing around the eight closely positioned window arches, is dated about 1870. Above the door is a stone crest of the Fellowes family. Today the Abbey estates still remain in the family.

Directly opposite is the **war memorial (22)**. Erected to commemorate the fallen of both World Wars, this Grade II listed memorial designed by sculptor FW Pomeroy, RA consists of a fine bronze statue of St George slaying the dragon on top of a tall octagonal pillar of Portland Stone.

As you leave Church Green the small mid 19th century **Hawk Bar (23)** formerly the Unicorn Public House, occupies a prominent corner position. Opposite is the Scout Hut which was once **Ramsey's Fire Station (24)**.

Take the right fork into New Road and follow the road down and around the bend, noting on your left the 'fish scale' roof slates on the terrace known as **Scotts Row (25)**.

In front of you is New Town Green. This pleasant green oasis, fringed on all sides by horse chestnut and lime trees is only 8 feet/2.5m above sea level. **As you leave New Town Green, cross over the road** to the site of the Old Smithy, now a bungalow called **'The Old Forge'(26)**. Note the anvil in the front garden. Continue until you reach the junction with the Great Whyte where the weekly Saturday market is held.

Turn right until you reach the Jolly Sailor Public House (27). This is one of the few survivors of the many public houses that used to line the riverside. Dating from the early 17th century with 19th century alterations, it is timber framed with brick casing rendered at the first floor. Note the extremely narrow entrance door. Look down Great Whyte and in the distance you will see a tall building, which was formerly Flowers' Flour Mill built in 1892, but is now the Rivermill flats. Just past this building is the site of **Ramsey Docks (28)**, where the tunnels that carry the water under the Great Whyte begin. Caution is needed as the water can be deep and fast flowing.

From the Jolly Sailor, cross Great Whyte and walk back towards the Clock Tower, passing on your right the attractive red-brick fronted **Baptist Chapel (29)**. This was rebuilt in 1894 on the site of a former chapel dating from 1803. **Continue past number 30 Lyndhurst (30)** with its high level fire insurance plaque. **This completes the town trail.**

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in this publication, no liability can be accepted by the author for any omissions of inaccuracies

Discover more...

To find out more about the history of Ramsey and the places you have seen, take a short walk down Wood Lane and visit:

The Walled Garden (A) - the walled kitchen garden of the Abbey House, which has been restored in the style of a Victorian garden.

Opening times

Sundays & Bank Holiday Mondays
2pm-5pm from April to October inclusive. www.ramseywalledgarden.org

The award winning **Ramsey Rural Museum (B)** - step back in time and discover how life used to be lived in a small fenland community with its Victorian chemists, cobblers, school room and mortuary chapel.

Opening times

Thursday 10am-5pm,
Saturday and Sunday 2pm-5pm
from April to October inclusive
www.ramseyruralmuseum.co.uk

Take a trip back to the 40s at **The 1940's Camp (C)** - a venue for year round events including the 1940s weekend in August.
www.ramsey1940s.co.uk

Mortuary Chapels (D)

Opening times First Sunday of the month 2pm-5pm from April to October



 Interpretation board

 Library