



Lowland highs

The 2011 CTC Birthday Rides will explore the rolling countryside of Suffolk. **Paul Remblance** and **Paul Fenton** describe one of the week's rides

Big skies, picturesque countryside, and quiet lanes with high hedges: Suffolk is Constable country. Hills are modest so it's an easy landscape to explore by bike, particularly for families. This ride, however, is one of the longer ones at 60 miles.

It starts from the base for the week, Framlingham College. Framlingham is a market town not far from coastal resorts and from popular birdwatching areas around the estuaries. Being fairly close to the sea and to the Continent, it's been a busy stage for historical events. From the end of the Roman Empire until the late medieval period, East Anglia was the most densely populated part of Britain. And it played a pivotal role in the defence of Britain in World War II.

Framlingham College is a Victorian Gothic edifice which overlooks the unusual thirteen towers of Framlingham Castle. From there, Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VIII, mounted her successful claim to the throne of England in the succession crisis of July 1553, ousting Lady Jane Grey, the 'Nine Days Queen'.

Abbey roads

This ride winds its way roughly north to Flixton. It will be offered as one of the rides at the Birthday



Rides, which take place from 14th-20th August, but can of course be ridden at any time.

Starting in the centre of Framlingham, you take New Road at the mini roundabout. This soon leads past the mere, giving a fine view of the castle. A left turn takes you past Shawsgate vineyard, one of a number of commercial vineyards in Suffolk, and then you turn off to pass through Cransford. Bunkers were prepared on an estate here in 1940. They would have formed the hub of the armed resistance for much of East Anglia if the Germans had invaded.

The next village you reach is Peasenhall. Its main street runs

(Above) The tower mill at Pakenham was built in 1831 and restored in 1950. It's now a Grade II listed building (Above right) The Weavers tea room at Peasenhall



along either side of a stream and is sufficiently busy to support a local independent butcher. There are a couple of tea shops too. The timber-framed building next to the Weavers tea shop is a Landmark Trust restoration property.

From Peasenhall you leave towards Walpole but then turn off towards Heveningham, which you approach on a section of Roman road. A more modern road, the B1117, takes you through Heveningham village and in front of the grand facade of Heveningham Hall on your right. The Hall is in private hands and the grounds are sometimes open for big events. The parkland seen from the road



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has received much new planting in recent years and, together with restoration of the mere, is one of the grandest landscape re-creation projects in Suffolk in recent years.

The B-road takes you through Walpole to Halesworth. The centre of Halesworth is pedestrianised, but is worth stopping off for: there's a café by the bridge that has been a popular stop for cyclists for many years.

From Halesworth you head towards Flixton via the South Elmhams. You'll pass several wide greens on the way. These, and the yeoman cottages around them, are surviving features from the historic agricultural landscape of the claylands of central Suffolk. The greens are a splendid colourful spectacle in spring and early summer as they are unimproved grassland commons.

You will see references on the Ordnance Survey Landranger map to abbeys and a bishop's palace. The South Elmham villages surrounded a series of religious foundations. The 'old minster', with records of occupation from 680, was possibly the base for the Christian bishops of East Anglia, who were supported by the dynasty of kings linked to the Sutton Hoo treasure. The bishops moved away before Christianity was suppressed by the Viking invaders.

The later medieval period saw the

arrival of Benedictine monks at an abbey at Rumburgh and Augustinian nuns in a priory at Flixton. A detour following brown signs takes you to an architectural remnant of these foundations: South Elmham St Peter Palace, and adjacent to that, St Peter's micro-brewery. The bar is well worth a visit to taste the range of excellent beers on a terrace overlooking the Mere.

Wartime aviation

Soon the remains of Flixton airfield appear on your right. A memorial at the roadside commemorates the 'Bungay Buckaroos' – young American men who gave their lives bombing occupied Europe from here from 1943 to 1945. Flixton is part of a pattern of airfield sites across Suffolk and Norfolk created for that daylight bombing campaign. You will pass such an airfield at Metfield later in the ride.

In around three years, the sites were built and became home to around 6,000 young men living thousands of miles from home. They were deserted at the end of the war in Europe. If you look carefully at the landscape, there are remnants of old sand and gravel pits that supplied local materials for this 'war effort' and the construction of airfields at Parham, Metfield and Flixton.

The high point of the wartime history on the ride is The Norfolk

Fact file

Birthday Rides 2011

Route: B-ride to Flixton

Distance: 60 miles

Maps: OS Landranger 156

Terrain: Undulating East Anglian claylands

Places of interest: Framlingham Castle.

Peasenhall village and tea room. Heveningham Hall and parkland. Ancient village Commons and yeoman cottages. St Peter's Brewery and 10th century palace. WW2 Bungay Buckaroos memorial. Flixton Aviation Museum. Saxtead Post Mill.

Refreshments: Weavers tea rooms, Peasenhall; Bridge Café, Halesworth; St Peters Brewery; Buck Inn, Flixton; pubs in Metfield and Fressingfield.

Getting there: the nearest train station is Wickham Market station at Campsey Ashe, 8 miles away. It's on the Ipswich to Lowestoft line. By car, use IP13 9EY for sat navs. Framlingham is near Ipswich, and is about 90 minutes from Cambridge.

Further information: for more on the Birthday Rides, see birthdayrides.org or tel: 01748 821343.





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The ford at Honeybridge is fairly shallow and can be ridden across. There's the bridge, of course, if you don't fancy it



Directions

Start: Framlingham College (GR 6282 2640)

- Ride to mini roundabout at town centre. 1st exit and imm. L on New Road to B1120.
- L. SP NCN1. Then First R, SP Baptist Church.
- SO to second Left T Junction, where L, SP Bruisyard.
- SO at X-rds. L. at T Junction, SP Badingham.
- At next T, SO. Follow SO /all SPs to Peasehall.
- At A1120, R then 2nd L, SP Halesworth.
- L at next junction. L in 0.5 mile onto minor road. R in another 0.5 mile to join Roman Road.
- R at T with B1117. Follow B1117 to Halesworth.
- SO, SP A144 Bungay. At rbt take first exit, SP Town Centre. Follow The Thoroughfare left and then right to pedestrianised section. At end of link, R to Rbt. First exit to SP Bungay.
- At next junction, L SP The South Elhams. SO, all SPs to Wissett, SO all SPs to Rumburgh. SO all SPs to All Saints.
- Next junction, R SP St Peters. R at T Junction SP Hovis Byway.
- Next T Junction, L SP Flixton. After 1 mile on right, 446 Bomb Group memorial. Route continues R at T Junction by church.
- At B1062 R, then in 300m L. Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum.
- At B1062, retrace to Flixton junction. L SP South Elham Villages.
- SO at T. At next T (Waveney mushrooms), R SP St Cross.
- At next T, L SP St Margarets. By village sign R and first L, SP St James.
- SO at next junction. At next T, R SP Metfield.
- At next T, R to Fressingfield. At B1123, L SP Linstead. At junction by village stores R, SP Fressingfield. Continue SO all SPs Fressingfield.
- At T, R SP Fressingfield. In village, L Church Street.
- At B1116/village sign, R SP Stradbroke. SO at first junction. At second T, L SP Wilby.
- To B1117. R. At first junction, L SP Wilby. At T, L SP Laxfield.
- At next T, R. At B1118, L SP Dennington.
- At Brundish Crown, R SP Tannington. SO at T. At next T, L SP Dennington.
- At next T, R SP Tannington Hall. At next T, R SP Saxtead. At next T, L.
- At Saxtead Little Green, SO at T and immediately left to follow Chapel Road.
- At next T, R. Continue to mill. At A1120/ B1119 junction take B1119, SP Framlingham. Continue SO to Framlingham.

and Suffolk Aviation Museum. This is confusingly not on the airfield at all. You turn off the main road and find it behind the Buck Inn. The museum is a private collection by an enthusiast and, amazingly, is free to enter. (Donations are encouraged.) The site contains full-size aircraft from the 1930s to the 1980s, mementos of the Flixton base, and collections from organisations such as the Royal Observer Corps. The pub next door does good food if you need to refuel.

Your route back to Framlingham begins through more Elmhams. St Cross South Elmham is thought to be a corruption of Sancroft. William Sancroft was born at Fressingfield. During the Stuart period, he was dean and a main beneficiary to the post-fire-of-London St Paul's. Later he was Archbishop of Canterbury, ministering to both Charles II and James II. His tomb is in the church.

After Metfield, you find yourself in big-sky arable country. The villages are year-round farming communities. Many still retain their shops and pubs hereabouts as vital centres of their communities. Saxtead, the last village before Framlingham, is centred on a large green where you will find a well-preserved windmill in the hands of English Heritage.

This is an unusual mill, where the sails are carried by the main body of the mill that moves around a central 'post and round house' to follow the wind. Although the post mill concept dates from the 14th century, the working parts of the mill are largely Victorian. The good condition of the mill dates from a restoration 60 years ago when the mill was donated to the nation.

Continuing across the green, it's a straightforward run into Framlingham and the college.