

# Wymondham

## Friendly Invasion Walking Tour



*Visit  
Wymondham*



Funded by  
UK Government

**South Norfolk**  
COUNCIL

During WW2 more than 300,000 Americans settled into airbases scattered across East Anglia.

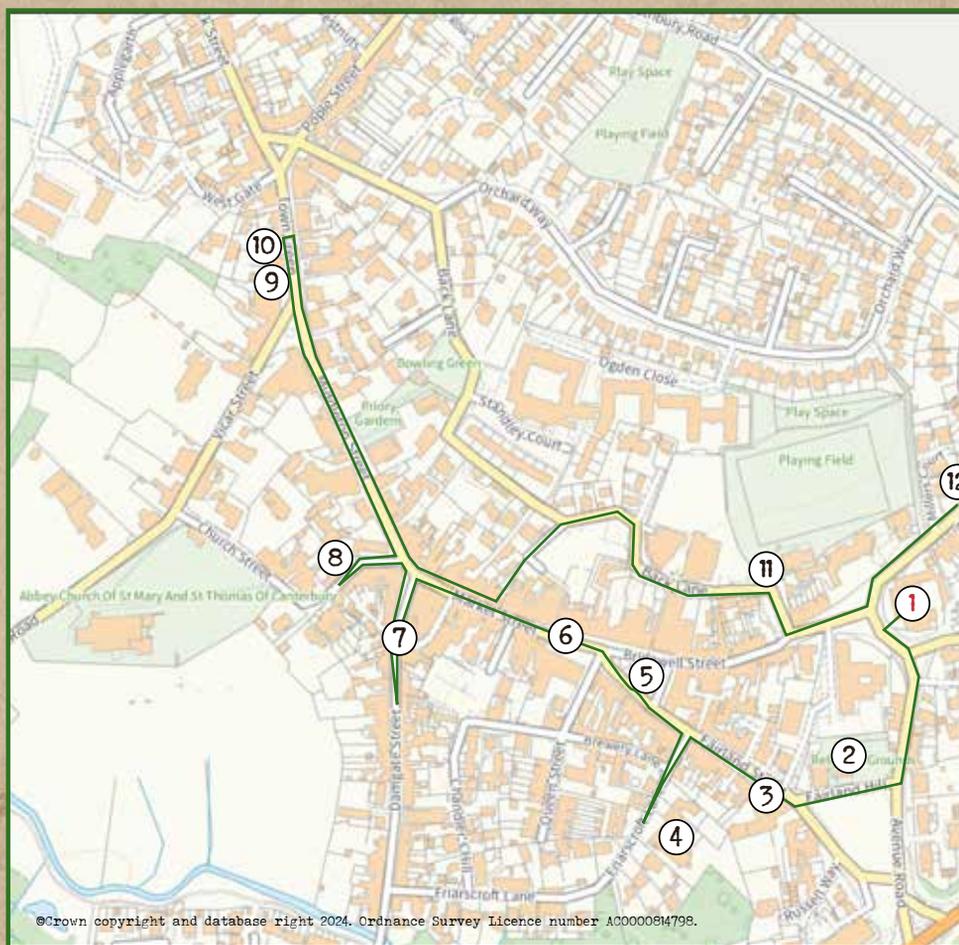
This 'Friendly Invasion' had the biggest impact on the landscape, culture, and people of East Anglia since the Norman Conquest.

This enjoyable and self-guided tour in our historic market town, takes about 60 minutes, with many inviting shops, and places to eat and drink along the way.

Start at 1 and follow the numbers, with each point described on the following pages.

### Beyond Wymondham

You can also follow the extended trail in a car or by bicycle. All the locations are in surrounding countryside within 15 miles of Wymondham town centre.



- ① Wymondham Heritage Museum
- ② Fairland Church
- ③ The Woolpack Inn
- ④ The Regal Cinema
- ⑤ Wymondham Market Cross
- ⑥ Market Street
- ⑦ Damgate
- ⑧ The Green Dragon
- ⑨ The Anglo-American Services Club
- ⑩ The Little Dustpan and 5 Town Green
- ⑪ The King's Head Meadow
- ⑫ The Windmill Pub

Photos courtesy of American Library, Memorial to the 2nd Air Division, 8th Air Force, United States Army Air Forces and Wymondham Heritage Museum.

## Welcome to Wymondham

This idyllic market town in South Norfolk has a picturesque marketplace, intriguing shops, medieval lanes, ancient meadows, museum, steam train station and the magnificent Wymondham Abbey.

Long before the Friendly Invasion of Americans of the USAAF, between 1943 and 1945, Wymondham already had experience of heroes in the form of Robert Kett and the many peasants he led into rebellion. He was a truly modern thinker who stood up for the rights of poor workers in the summer of 1549 and dared to challenge the King's authority.



## 1. Wymondham Heritage Museum

Serving as the first ever purpose-built prison in the land, a police station, and a Magistrates court, the Wymondham Bridewell is now home to Wymondham Heritage Museum. The museum is currently offering a 'Friendly Invasion' display in addition to its wonderful permanent collection telling the social history of Wymondham over the centuries.

The Friendly Invasion display takes visitors through the history of not only the American Air Force in Wymondham and at local Morley Hospital, but also the presence of the USAAF in Britain during WW2 more broadly. Discover interesting artefacts, and local stories of those whose lives were touched, shaped, and changed, by the American presence in Wymondham.

**WALK>> continue along Avenue Road until you see Fairland, the triangular green at the junction with Fairland Street, taking care when crossing as**



**this is a busy road. Fairland Church is the building that looks down over the green.**

## 2. Fairland Church

When Reverend Gayton of Fairland the Congregational Church left after a period of ill health, Captain Earl. O. Widen, the chaplain at Hethel Airbase stepped in, helping enormously with the church.

When he died suddenly on 28th June 1944 a bronze plaque was presented to the church by the 389th Bomb Group in his memory. Later, the chaplain of his own church in Minneapolis also gave a plaque. An American flag was also given to the church by the chaplain of the American Hospital at Morley.

**WALK>> to the other side of Fairland Green towards Myhills Pet and Garden store. This used to be the Woolpack Inn.**



## 3. The Woolpack Inn

During the Friendly Invasion, the Woolpack was a favourite with American servicemen who could often be seen enjoying a pint. The Woolpack closed its doors as a public house in 1966.

**WALK>> continue up Fairland Street and turn left onto Friarscroft, past Brewery Lane and stop in front of the Social Club on the left.**



## 4. The Regal Cinema

The Regal Cinema, now the Wymondham and District Ex Services Social Club, was in operation between 1937- 1993, and was a favourite destination for locals and American servicemen.

It was also popular with courting couples and always filled with American airmen in the evenings, frequently forming a long queue at the entrance.

**WALK>> retrace your steps back to Fairland Street, turn left and head for the Market Cross.**

## 5. Wymondham Market Cross

During the Second World War, the Wymondham Market Cross was the heart of the town, much as it is today. As a result, it was a popular meeting spot for American airmen and local girls before going on to a dance.

A local girl Pamela Standley would often arrange to meet the man she had fallen in love with, American airman John Fellowes. His written invitation to a local dance suggests the Cross as a meeting place. Today this, along with other personal artefacts relating to their love story, can be viewed at Wymondham Heritage Museum.



**WALK>> continue walking along Market Street, stopping first at the White Hart.**

## 6. Market Street

American airmen could often be seen riding down Market Street on their bicycles. It was the location for several destinations, including the Mary Elizabeth Tearooms, which was a particular favourite, as was The White Hart Inn.

**WALK>> continue until you reach the junction with Becket's Chapel and turn first left onto Damgate and walk a little way down.**

## 7. Damgate

A common place to see American airmen on their bicycles, Damgate was also the site of the 'Candy Parade', which took place over the Christmas period of 1943. This involved American airmen handing out candy and biscuits to local children outside of Alf Harvey's Fish and Chip shop.



**WALK>>** retrace your steps back to the junction with Market Street and this time turn left onto Church Street, and walk past Becket's Chapel on the right towards the Green Dragon ahead of you.

## 8. The Green Dragon

One of the most popular drinking spots for American airmen, The Green Dragon pub was an absolute favourite amongst the Americans stationed at local airbases and also those who had been discharged from Morley Hospital.

It was such a favourite, that the 389th Bomb Group stationed at Hethel named themselves 'The Green Dragons' after the pub - today it is largely unaltered.



**WALK>>** retrace yours steps to the junction and walk up Middleton Street until you reach the War Memorial and stop by the large white building which is the Wymondham Business Centre.

## 9. The Anglo-American Services Club

The Anglo-American Services Club (now the Wymondham Sports Bar) was an important and central addition to the American presence in Wymondham.

Previously, the building had been the old Picture House which had closed its doors in 1940. The club was officially opened in March 1944 and was run largely by the Church Army with the help of local volunteers. Inside, the club housed a dance hall, canteen, and recreation space and it was a popular place for servicemen to hold dances (often attended by locals), play games, unwind, and socialise. The canteen served food that, although not familiar to Wymondham locals, was intended to make the Americans feel more at home - along with other 'American' additions, such as a shoe-shine parlour. It was at this club that the Morley Hospital band 'The Gable Gaiters' played, and a VE Day party was held.



**WALK>>** continue past a couple more shop fronts along Town Green and stop by No 5 Town Green. Please note this is a private property.

## 10. The Little Dustpan and 5 Town Green

Pamela Standley was the daughter of a local business owner and was still at school when World War Two broke out. She lived on Town Green next to her family's business 'The Little Dustpan'.

Today, a mock-up of this store is housed at Wymondham Heritage Museum.

On 1st April 1944, Pamela met John 'Johnny' Fellowes at a dance held at what is now Wymondham High School. The two began a romance, going to dances, the cinema, and exploring the local area. Pamela was 16 and Johnny was 19. He came from Parkin Cross, Arkansas, and was based at Deopham Green, attached to a plane named 'Frigolous Sal'.



He visited Pamela's home regularly on Town Green, and was well liked by all her friends and family. Pamela fell deeply in love with John and, during his time in Norfolk, the two shared a special relationship.

After completing 25 missions, he returned to the US, and the two continued to exchange letters. Theirs is an example of a wartime love story, not uncommon between American airmen and local girls.

Unfortunately Pamela would receive her last letter from Johnny in 1945, and despite waiting and counting the days and months, she would never hear from him again.

To find out more about their story and what happened, and to see the personal collection of artefacts, visit the exhibition at Wymondham Heritage Museum. Wymondham Antiques Centre now occupies the building that was once The Little Dustpan, although it continues to be owned by the Standley family.

**WALK>> return all the way back to the White Hart and follow the alleyway to the right of the Inn, through the car park onto Back Lane and follow it to the right until you reach the King's Head Meadow.**



## 11. The King's Head Meadow

A popular place for sports over the decades, the King's Head Meadow was the site of the 1944 charity sports event between British and American forces. It was held in May and attracted crowds of 3000. It was also home to a baseball demonstration put on by the Americans for locals.



**WALK>>** from King's Head Meadow continue along Back Lane and then turn left onto Elm Terrace and keep walking straight on as it turns into Norwich Road. You'll see what was the Windmill Pub on the right, just after you've walked past the Roman Catholic Church.

## 12. The Windmill Pub

Another popular drinking spot for American servicemen, The Windmill pub on Norwich Road (now private housing), was a well-attended social venue for American airmen and the locals they befriended, known for its charm and contrast to American bars. (Photo 1960s).



**FINISH** You have reached the end of the trail and can return to the Market Cross in the centre of Wymondham.

## The Wymondham Laundry

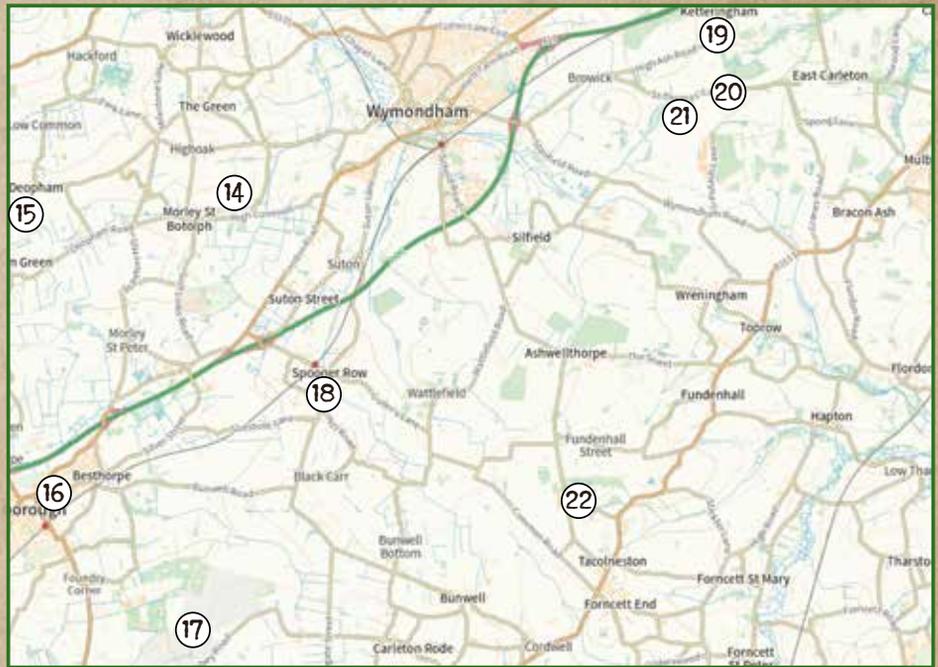
The Wymondham Laundry, off Norwich Road, was where the Americans took their laundry. Locals who remember this time recounted how popular the Americans were, particularly with local children, and how these visits by the Americans were much enjoyed and anticipated.



## The Extended Tour

These sites are best visited by car or bicycle. Please use this map to orientate yourself or use the road information to direct yourself to the sites.

- ⑭ Morley Hospital & Morley Old Hall
- ⑮ Deopham Green Airbase
- ⑯ Attleborough Anglo-American Club
- ⑰ Old Buckenham Airbase
- ⑱ The Boars Spooner Row
- ⑲ Ketteringham Hall
- ⑳ The Hethel Hangar
- ㉑ Hethel Airbase
- ㉒ All Saints Hethel



### 14. Morley Old Hall & Morley Hospital

In 1939, the grounds of Morley Hall were taken over for agriculture, and then replaced by an emergency hospital. This was handed over to the Americans, as the 77th Station Hospital, serving the medical needs of around 60,000 personnel of the 9th Air Force in the area, including 15 heavy bomber bases. Around 60% of casualties were because of flak, 15% from cannon shell fragments, and the remainder from crashes and accidents. Patients were mostly 18 to 30 years old.



In March 1944, it became the '231st Station Hospital' after the 231st moved from Suffolk. Over 1944/45, 3221 patients were evacuated to Morley. The wards were largely based in Nissen huts, kitted out to be as comfortable as possible.

Like every American Hospital, Morley had an attached Prisoner of War camp for German POWs for the duration of its operation. This is 5 minutes' drive from Morley Old Hall and today this site is the home of Wymondham College.

## 15. Deopham Green Airfield

The Old Runway Road,  
Deopham Green

A few miles north of Attleborough was the Deopham Green Airfield, where the 452nd Bomb Group was stationed in early 1944. It had more than 2000 yards of main runway and two 1400 yard auxiliary runways. Many dances and social events took place at Deopham Green, where locals were invited to join the servicemen. Today there is a memorial at the site, (on the Attleborough Road section which links to the Old Runway Road) marking its USAAF history and honouring the servicemen who never returned.



## 16. Attleborough Anglo-American Services Club

Station Road, Attleborough

Attleborough's proximity to both Morley Hospital and many of the surrounding airbases, meant the Anglo-American Services Club was a popular and central spot to meet, and many dances were held here. Today it is the Connaught Hall.



## 17. Old Buckenham Airbase

Off Abbey Road, Buckenham

Old Buckenham, which is still an airfield today, was home to 453rd Bomb Group, flying 259 missions between winter 1943 and April 1945. They lost 58 planes and 366 aircrew.

### Hollywood Stars

Film star Jimmy Stewart was Group Operations Officer at Old Buckenham, and actor Walter Matthau was also stationed here as a radioman-gunner. A museum was erected on the site on Remembrance Sunday 2015 and an air show is hosted at Old Buckenham annually.

## 18. The Boars

Spoooner Row

The Boars is still easily reached by bicycle today from Wymondham. During the Friendly Invasion it was often filled with Americans enjoying a pint and socialising with locals. Here a G.I. can be seen outside of The Boars on his bicycle.



## 19. Ketteringham Hall

Church Road, Ketteringham

Ketteringham Hall was used as the USAAF Second Air Division Headquarters, Station 147, between December 1943 and June 1945. During its time as HQ, some family members continued to live at the house, although it was remodelled by the USAAF. For example, the ground floor became the Operations section covering mostly intelligence. Of the roughly 700 staff stationed here, about 300 were women - an important reminder on the significant and essential role women played in the war effort.



USAAF personnel at the Ketteringham Hall headquarters. Jimmy Stewart moved from Old Buckenham in 1944 to become the 2nd Combat Wing's Chief of Staff as Lieutenant Colonel. He is pictured here, seated, second from the left.

## 20. The Hethel Hangar

St. Thomas' Lane

On the edge of what was once the Hethel Airfield, is one of the T2 hangars used by the USAAF, giving an idea of the vast operational range of the airforce and the buildings on their bases. Please note this is private property, so can only be viewed from the lane.

## 21. Hethel Airbase

Potash Lane, Hethel

Hethel was home to three bomb groups. The 320th and 310th were medium and 389th was a heavy bomb group. The site, built in 1942, was used by both the USAAF and the RAF. From September 1942 to June 1945 RAF Hethel was used as the headquarters for both 2nd Combat Bombardment Wing and the 2nd Bombardment Division.

As was the case with most airbases, Hethel was very self-contained with its own stores, library, chapel, cinema, recreational rooms and spaces, and a gymnasium.



Today the restored Hethel Chapel hosts a museum dedicated to the USAAF in WW2. Various other parts of the original buildings and Nissen huts remain on the site. Visit [www.hethel389thbg.com](http://www.hethel389thbg.com) for info.

## 22. All Saints

Church Lane, Hethel

All Saints Church, Hethel, situated down a peaceful country lane, has a memorial to the 389th Bomb Group and its attached units of the 8th USAAF, who were stationed at Hethel. Located towards the front of the churchyard, it commemorates those who lost their lives serving during WW2 and today, serves as a poignant reminder of the many Americans who came to Britain as part of the Friendly Invasion and never returned home.

## Discover Wymondham's Friendly Invasion by bicycle



Above is a suggested cycle route for the extended trail. It takes you from Wymondham and the central trail, through the points of the extended trail in number order. This route leads off main roads to safer side roads and scenic countryside lanes, allowing for the safest and least traffic heavy option.

Below is a link which can either be clicked on in the digital version of this trail, or typed in, should you be using the paper version, which will take you to the route so that it can be followed. We hope you enjoy exploring the trail by bicycle just as the American servicemen would have done! Happy cycling!

[www.ridewithgps.com/routes/49473333](http://www.ridewithgps.com/routes/49473333)



## We Will Remember Them 100th Bomb Group

When America entered WW2 after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, hundreds of thousand of young Americans, joined up to help in the fight against Hitler. Many came to Norfolk and for over two highly intense years RAF Thorpe Abbots became home to the 100th Bomb Group. Notorious for their losses and admired for their immense bravery, this Bomb Group was the inspiration for the recent series 'Masters of the Air'. In their first mission alone, they lost three planes and thirty men. During 22 months they were credited with 8630 missions, with the terrible loss of 732 airmen and 177 aircraft. To visit the museum check for details on [www.100bgmus.org.uk](http://www.100bgmus.org.uk)

## More locations

There are many more places in the area south of Norwich where you can still see evidence of the impact of the Friendly Invasion. For any museums please check ahead of travelling for opening days and times.

Attlebridge  
Bodney  
East Rentham  
Fersfield  
Hardwick  
Horsham St Faiths  
North Pickenham  
Rackheath  
Sculthorpe  
Seething  
Shipdham  
Snetterton Heath  
Tibenham  
Watton

**In memory**

To the many servicemen who gave their lives during World War Two.

**With special thanks**

To Sarah Standley, Adrian Hoare, Philip Yaxley and the late Anne Hoare for their enormous contribution to local history over the years.

Without them and their knowledge and extraordinary body of work, this project would not have been possible.

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