



THE BURNHAMS

PEOPLE AND PLACE

The group of villages known collectively as the Burnhams are scattered either side of the river Burn in some of the most attractive countryside in North Norfolk. The largest and best known is Burnham Market, which has a delightful spacious tree-shaded green at its centre and is lined on either side by gracious Georgian houses. Known as Little London or Chelsea-on-Sea because of the influx of wealthy ‘furriners’ since the 1970s, this is prime second home country – at least if you have several hundred thousand pounds to spare – and many former visitors have chosen to retire here. This influx of wealth has brought changes, good and bad. You will find two nationally acclaimed restaurants here. The Hoste Arms and Fishes Restaurant are only a few buildings apart and face the green on Burnham Market’s main street. For a village of its size the range of top notch food and wine shops is remarkable as well as others selling stylish clothes, antiques, books and jewellery. The green here is a lively cosmopolitan place in summer and especially busy in July and August when the carnival, flower show and a popular craft fair take place.

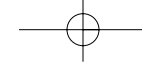
Few visitors to Burnham Market will take time to explore the other six Burnhams. Furthest west lies Burnham Deepdale with a winding creek connecting it to Brancaster Staithe, wonderful marsh walks along its sea walls, and a classic North Norfolk round-towered flint church. Also fringing the marshes are Burnham Norton and Burnham Overy Staithe. The Staithe is a popular spot for sailing at the mouth of the river Burn and at low tide the channel is a wonderful area for paddling, crabbing and generally having fun in the water. Inland and easternmost

is Burnham Thorpe, famed as the birthplace of Nelson, with a fine church and a pub – named The Nelson of course. Both these buildings are a treasure trove of Nelson memorabilia.

The final two Burnhams are Burnham Overy Town (a small village!) and Burnham Westgate, the latter really the western end of Burnham Market.



Opposite: Burnham Market busy during its annual summer craft fair.
Above: Burnham Deepdale’s popular jazz festival.



TIME AND TIDE

*London, York, and Coventry
And the seven Burnhams by the Sea*
(Trad.)

The importance of this area in medieval times is illustrated by this old traditional verse. Burnham Market held a market charter in 1209, earlier than any other North Norfolk settlement, apart from Wells.

The river Burn, like the Stiffkey and Glaven further east, was originally tidal for many miles inland. Prior to the 1400s it was tidal as far inland as North Creake but around 1400 it is recorded, 'sea gone back and river embanked'. These changes may in part have been a result of natural silting causing changes to the river estuary. At one time the Burn flowed out to sea at Burnham Deepdale but as Scolt Head Island grew, the river mouth was deflected eastwards.

The wealth of the Burnhams was based on sheep. Overy means a sheep farm and the ancient drove road, shown on today's OS map as Gong Lane, runs straight from Overy Town to the marshes which provided summer grazing at Overy Staithe. In the early 1300s grazing land was taxed in wool. Most of East Anglia paid one wool sack for each 1500 acres but in North Norfolk it was a sack for every 600 acres reflecting the wealth of the area. The other source of wealth was malting barley. The former large maltings at Burnham Overy Staithe were converted into the well known Moorings Hotel which closed in the early 1970s.

Even in the space of two generations huge changes have affected the

Burnhams. Gone are the days when most people living here would have been born within walking distance of the house where they spent their adult lives. Only 50 years ago Burnham Market had a cattle market every Monday. Today this is a predominantly arable landscape. Fifty years ago you could catch a train from Burnham Market to Wells,

Norwich, Heacham or even a through train to London. Then there were five pubs in Burnham Market, of which only two, the Hoste Arms and the Lord Nelson now remain. In the 1930s and early 1940s horses still ploughed the fields, there was no mains electricity and paraffin lamps lit the village houses. At this time there were three bakeries, a foundry, a shoemaker, a blacksmith's forge, a saddler and a harness maker trading in Burnham Market. The 1920s and 1930s were tough times in North Norfolk with people finding work where they could – buying and selling wild rabbit skins being one way of making a living.

All this has changed, and in most ways for the better. It's a romantic illusion to think that life was anything but hard then. The days when most people worked in agriculture and a single farm could field a cricket team with its labourers belong to a very different but not so distant era. Today tourism and commuting sustain the wealth of the Burnhams with only a handful of villagers making a living directly from the land or sea.

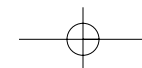


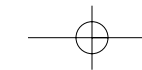
Above: Village sign – Burnham Thorpe birthplace of Nelson.

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

- ~ What's in a name? Burnham means a settlement by a river. Burn is derived from the Old English Burna for a stream or river. In the Domesday record it was written as Bruneham.
- ~ Birthplace of Nelson. Horatio Nelson was born on 29 September 1758 in the rectory of All Saint's church, Burnham Thorpe. He was the son of Edmund Nelson the parson. Though the rectory building no longer exists a plaque on the wall close to the church marks the site of his birthplace.
- ~ Famous timbers. The wood of the cross and lectern in Burnham Thorpe's church is made of wood from Nelson's ship *HMS Victory*.
- ~ Anyone for tea? Richard Woodget, born in the Burnhams, became captain of the famous tea clipper *Cutty Sark*. During his time as captain he broke many trans-Atlantic speed records. He retired to Burnham Overy and lived in the property now named Flagstaff House on the shore line at Burnham Overy Staithe between 1899 and 1926. He died in 1928 and is buried in Burnham Norton churchyard.
- ~ Admiral Nelson specified in his will that he wanted to be buried at All Saints church Burnham Thorpe, 'unless the King decrees otherwise'. The King, George III, did decree otherwise and Nelson was buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

- ~ At the Nelson pub in Burnham Thorpe you can drink in the room where Nelson once gave a party for the villagers before leaving Burnham Thorpe to captain the Royal Navy ship the *Agamemnon*.
- ~ The disappearing Goosebeck. A stream named the Goosebeck sometimes flows through the centre of Burnham Market creating a ford across the main street. In some years it flows for nine months and in other years for as little as six weeks. The water originates from a chalk aquifer and arises as a spring situated west of Whiteway Road. This flows into the 'Fishpool' at Burnham Westgate before being channelled as the Goosebeck through the centre of Burnham Market.
- ~ Burnham Market was originally made up from three smaller settlements, Burnham Westgate, Burnham Sutton and Burnham Ulph. Ulph was a Danish Chieftain and the brother of King Canute.
- ~ Burnham rice paddies. Sequences from the James Bond film, *Die Another Day*, were filmed at Burnham Deepdale. Flooded grazing land was converted into a landscape of rice paddies for the film. The closing sequences of a helicopter flying over rice paddies into which two sports cars have fallen was shot here.





The Burnhams

WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE

Redshank's warning, curlew's call
Silence permeating every sound

The coastline between Burnham Deepdale, Burnham Norton and Burnham Overy Staithe is comparatively sheltered and extensive saltmarshes have developed in the lee of Scolt Head Island. Reclaimed by centuries-old sea walls, freshwater marshes also form a wonderful wildlife habitat in their own right. In spring lapwings tumble in spectacular courtship displays over cattle-grazed pastures, redshanks call in flight or stand alert on wooden fence posts, and marsh harriers patrol in search of unwary prey. The dykes – wet ‘fences’ which separate one block of grazing from the next – are home to grass snakes, dragonflies and frogs. Herons stand hunched in field corners, or wait poised for prey on dyke edges and in the reeds which fringe these dykes, reed and sedge warblers sing to establish territories or busily seek food for hungry young.

In winter, from November to March, the grazing marshes are alive with large flocks of brent geese and wigeon and the edges of shallow pools within the fields are favoured by teal, snipe and redshanks.

For an unparalleled experience of this environment follow the Norfolk Coast Path from Burnham Deepdale around to Burnham Overy Staithe. The path follows the top of a seawall and offers contrasting views. On the seaward side lie saltmarshes and to landward the freshwater pasture of Deepdale and Norton Marshes.

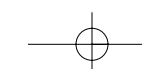
There is a very different walk, but one of my personal favourites, from the car park at Burnham Overy Staithe to the sand dunes of Gun Hill. From the Staithe follow the sea wall. This is a superb vantage point for birdwatching with views over the estuary of the river Burn. From the harbour to the sea is roughly two kilometres of fairly easy walking, though in winter the path can be muddy and slippery. At low tide Overy Creek always has a good selection of waders feeding on its muddy winding channel. Dunlins, redshanks, curlews, grey plovers, oystercatchers and ringed plovers are joined at migration times by godwits, sandpipers, greenshanks and stints. There are nearly always shelducks here and as the

tide moves in and the channel deepens, look for sleek cormorants diving for fish. The marram-covered dunes and the fine sandy beach reached by a boardwalk at the end of the seawall form a pleasing contrast to the earlier parts of this walk. Between April and June the dune slacks have wonderful displays of marsh and pyramidal orchids and, with luck and keen eyes, you may also spot bee orchids. By late June and July rosebay willowherb colours the sides of the dunes in fiery pink drifts and the yellow ragwort is being munched by large numbers of black and orange cinnabar moth caterpillars which strip the plants, leaving only a spiky stem behind. Even in winter this walk is a delight, with brent geese, pink-footed geese and wigeon often in large numbers on the fields which back the dunes between here and Holkham.



Above: Brent geese flying low into the wind – Burnham Overy marshes.

Opposite: Burnham Overy Staithe – looking seawards to the mouth of the River Burn.





WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE

Another favourite Burnham haunt is the old water mill, now owned by the National Trust and converted into holiday flats, which lies on a sharp bend of the coast road between Burnham Overy Staithe and Burnham Norton. Lean on the old stone bridge which crosses the river Burn here and very often there are sea-trout lying in the pool below. Otters use this stretch of the river and there are usually swans, little grebes and wagtails to watch. The fields next to the coast road just beyond the bridge are prime barn owl hunting territory and it's often worth pausing here in late afternoon to enjoy the spectacle of a barn owl methodically quartering the ground in search of prey.

The North Norfolk coast between Burnham Norton and Burnham Overy Staithe forms part of the huge Holkham National Nature Reserve (NNR). Holkham NNR was established in 1967 and, covering around 4000 hectares, is one of the largest NNRs in England. The saltmarshes and freshwater grazing marshes of the Burnhams are also protected as part of the North Norfolk coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This area of the coast is internationally important for the numbers of brent geese, pink-footed geese and wigeon that winter here. Deepdale Marsh, Norton Marsh and Overy Marsh together form the largest area of freshwater grazing marsh on the North Norfolk coast. Significant for wintering wildfowl they are also important breeding areas for redshanks and lapwings. Reedbeds at Burnham Deepdale, Burnham Norton and Burnham Overy provide breeding habitat for bearded tits and marsh harriers, and wintering grounds for bitterns.

Top: Sea rocket carpets the upper foreshore at Burnham Overy.
 Bottom left: Bee orchid – Burnham Overy dunes.
 Bottom right: Sand dunes – Burnham Overy.
 Opposite: Barn owl at Burnham Norton on a frosty winter morning.

