

# Hanseatic King's Lynn

## a self guided trail

### Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and Maritime Exhibition

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### Hit the Trail

Pick up a Discover King's Lynn from the TIC to explore the King's Lynn heritage trail. Discover King's Lynn's rich maritime history with the Maritime Trail or explore the town's fascinating medieval heritage by following the Pilgrimage Trail. Leaflets on all trails are available from the TIC.

### Guided Walks

Take a guided walk with the King's Lynn Town Guides to hear the stories which bring the history to life. Pick up a programme from the TIC or call 01553 774297 for more details.

### King's Lynn Borough Archives

Tel: 01553 774297 or call Norfolk Record Office on 01603 222599

### www.visitwestnorfolk.com

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Borough Council of  
**King's Lynn &  
West Norfolk**



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1390-46

Edward Everard for £800 in 1751. The street range was then remodelled in the form of the fine Georgian mansion seen today.

Lübeck called on Danzig in April 1475 to appoint a governor for the Lynn Kontor but a Hamburg merchant called Lutkyn Smith was in the position in 1505. The headquarters of the Hanseatic League in England was its London Kontor called "The Steelyard" on the north bank of the Thames near Tower Bridge. Representatives from the provincial Kontors were called to meetings here (demolished in the 1850s).

After the Treaty of Utrecht (1474) the Port of Lynn emerged as the key crossroads of Anglo-Hanseatic trade in East Anglia with Prussia its special connection. The Mayor and Common Council soon entered into negotiation with "the merchants of the Hansa called Esterlynges residing at Lynn in le Stileyard" over local commercial privileges such as permission to retail. Fish, pitch, tar, iron, furs, wax, flax, hemp and timber products arrived in vessels from Hamburg and Danzig in exchange for wool, cloth, hides, lead, beer and (sometimes) cheese. Of Lynn's exports, cloth and wool were by far the most important in the 14th and 15th centuries with English merchants gradually taking a bigger share of the trade. Hanseatic traders were always the largest alien group or hanse in the medieval town.

Lynn's prominent role in commercial intercourse with Prussia should be emphasised. In lists of English losses in trade with Prussia covering 3 main periods (1370 to 1388, 1388 to 1436 and 1474 to 1491) its merchants came first usually with about one third of all English damages. These primary sources or official records tend to reflect Anglo-Hanseatic economic rivalry and conflict. However, most of the time English and German merchants simply wanted to maintain friendly relations to maximise financial gain. In a Lübeck customs list detailing five ports (1474 – 81) Lynn was placed third behind Hull in the number of active Hanseatic traders (41 and 43 respectively) but by the value of taxed goods the Wash port was fourth after Ipswich. Boston was fifth with only 2 Hanseatic merchants listed. The Wash havens deserve more attention however. Of all those provincial ports on England's east coast, Lynn and Boston had the earliest and strongest links with the Hanseatic League, and were alone highlighted in the Treaty of Utrecht (1474).

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Trail devised by Dr. Paul Richards

of "Danzig" chests which Hanseatic vessels carried to Lynn from where they could be distributed inland by water. It seems that they were sold at Stourbridge Fair to Cambridge colleges for example. In an inventory of the Priory Church in 1454 eleven such chests are listed and this one might be a survivor.

### 11) Hanse House (St. Margaret's House)

The Georgian mansion overlooking St Margaret's introduces the visitor to one of England's most significant historic buildings, spanning the 15th to the 18th centuries. This complex around a courtyard is the only remaining Kontor or trading post of the Hanseatic League in England. Medieval merchants engaged in long distance commerce required places to stay and store their goods. Here German merchants had their lodgings, warehouses, offices and stalls or shops. The front or street range was probably a timber framed structure in the late 15th century with its entrance adorned with the double headed eagle of the Hanseatic League.

The property came into the possession of the Hanseatic League in 1475 as a result of the Treaty of Utrecht (1474) which restarted Anglo-Hanseatic trade after several years of sea warfare. Men from Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen and Danzig had rented or bought houses in the town from the 1270s or earlier. Now the Hanseatic League possessed a Kontor in Lynn as at Hull, Boston, Ipswich and London. It redeveloped the site in the late 1470s or 1480s as the two warehouses can be dated to this period. German merchants occupied their new trading post until the 1560s when it was let to Lynn merchants before the entire property was sold to

Lynn. Sadly, the son died here, leaving Margery to escort her daughter-in-law back to Prussia in 1433. Margery's amazing and eventful life is told in "The Book of Margery Kempe".

Margery Kempe's imposing father, John Brunham, would have been an acquaintance of the men and their wives depicted on the two famous brasses in the Church. Adam Walsoken (died 1349) and Robert Braunche (died 1364) were both Lynn mayors and major figures in the Great Guild whose chapel was in St Margaret's (remains in north aisle of chancel). In the 14th century the Wash port was interwoven with Hanseatic trade networks (linking the Baltic and North Sea havens especially). The Braunche and Walsoken brasses were made in Flanders in the same workshops from which German merchants commissioned similar high status memorials for transport to Lübeck and other North German towns. There can be no doubt that Lynn's merchant rulers were following the fashion of the Hanseatic traders with whom they were so familiar. Many other medieval brasses in Lynn and Lübeck were unfortunately stolen or destroyed in the course of the 18th century.

What is sometimes called a "standard" chest stands in the north aisle of the nave. Of pine with a willow lid, they were depositories for books, clothes, candles, plates or other valuables, and found in both ecclesiastical and merchant households as well as in town halls. The St Margaret's example is one of nearly 90 in England whose distribution is concentrated in East Anglia and they were almost certainly imported. Dendrochronology has recently confirmed that these chests were manufactured in the 15th century. English customs accounts of this period refer to the import

Bergen and Iceland. Fascinating insights into Lynn's relationship with the Hanseatic towns on the Baltic can be found in the "Book of William Ashbourne" in the Borough Archive. The Hall Books or Town Council proceedings also contain references of interest to students of Anglo-Hanseatic history. Facsimiles of these valuable medieval records are kept as part of the town regalia.

### 10) St Margaret's Priory Church

It is not certain if the Hanseatic community in Lynn was closely involved with St Margaret's but it is likely that funerals of German merchants took place in the Priory Church. In Boston they had close ties with the Greyfriars. A connection between German residents in the town and the Lynn house of these Franciscans is suggested by the gift of land made to it by Bernard Estrensis in 1287. Traders from the Baltic or East were called "Easterlings" in England and they often carried this locative surname.

The Greyfriars tower was erected about 1400 to enhance the Church and acted as an important seamark for ships sailing into the Wash until the 19th century; the spire on St St Margaret's south-west tower performed a similar function as did that on the tower of St Nicholas. The medieval spires of both St Margaret's and St Nicholas fell during a storm in 1741.

Margery Kempe (c1373 – 1440), Lynn's famous religious mystic, was well known in St Margaret's and South Lynn. The daughter and wife of prominent town merchants and guildsmen, her son lived and worked in Danzig where he married a German woman. The couple travelled to



# King's Lynn & The Hanseatic League

King's Lynn has a long and illustrious maritime tradition. The extensive inland waterway system and its geographical position made it ideal for European trade from Baltic and English coastal ports. By the 13th century King's Lynn was one of the country's foremost ports. The town attracted traders from the Hanseatic League, a group of German cities whose ships travelled together in convoys for safety, especially against pirates. They came to Lynn with fish, furs, timber, wax and pitch and took away English wool, cloth and salt. The port today is still busy exporting grain and importing timber.

King's Lynn has the only surviving Hanseatic warehouse in England just off the Saturday Market Place. In 2005 the town became the only English member of the New Hanseatic League, whose 177 members include Hamburg and Lübeck, with the aim of developing business links and promoting culture, heritage and tourism between member towns and cities.

Discover the fascinating history of key hanseatic sites by following the Hanseatic Trail.



## King's Lynn: A Hanseatic Walk

### 1) Custom House

The walk starts in the Custom House with the display on the Hanseatic League. The ship model is an important exhibit. Why was the Hanseatic League a successful confederation of German towns? Partly because its vessels were the first North European container ships transporting bulk cargoes (fish, grain, wax, pitch, timber) across the Baltic and North Sea. The reconstructed Hansekogge which sailed into Lynn in August 2004 is in model form here. These 14th century ships linked Lynn with Hamburg, Bremen, Lübeck, Rostock and Danzig. The Lisa von Lübeck which visited Lynn in 2009 was a reconstructed caravel or the 15th century development of the Kogge. It was a bigger ship and easier to defend against pirates with castles or platforms fore and aft for soldiers.

### 2) King Street

Known as "Stockfish Row" or "Le Chequer" in the fourteenth century and the main street of the Newland laid out by the Norwich Bishops in the 1140s. By the 15th century this thoroughfare was the preferred location of Lynn's top merchants who built new houses and warehouses running down to the river. The Great Ouse was deeper in this part of the town enabling bigger ships to moor at private quays. The Common Staith to the west of the Tuesday Market Place had become the principal public quay.

### 3) St George's Guildhall

Is the sole medieval complex to have survived in King Street; one of its leading patrons was John Brandon who traded with the Hanseatic towns. He may have been instrumental with other rich merchants in the rebuilding of St Nicholas Chapel in the early 15th century. In 1473 the Hanseatic League sought a property in King Street to function as their new Kontor or trading post in the town.

### 4) The Purfleet

Go to the car park in Baker Lane via Purfleet Street and the footbridge before stopping approximately between Baker Lane toilets and the river itself. An archaeological excavation took place here in 1968 – 69 revealing a quay with timber supports proving that the Purfleet had been about three times its current width in the 14th century. It was a safe harbour for English and foreign ships.

The Purfleet was also the disembarkation point for British and continental pilgrims arriving at the Port of Lynn on route to the Shrine of our Lady at Walsingham. Ships similar to the Kieler Hansekogge and Lisa von Lübeck would have brought German pilgrims into Lynn in the 14th and 15th centuries. Merchant vessels commonly carried passengers across the North Sea and Baltic.

### 5) Queen Street

Walk to the junction of Baker Lane and Queen Street and turn left.

### 6) Clifton House

This magnificent building, (with 1708 barley sugar columns adorning its porch) has an exceptional early 14th century tiled floor of the Westminster type and an impressive mid 14th century brick undercroft. Here stood a grand late medieval mansion well known to Hanseatic traders who might have been house guests. Unlike other alien merchants, the Germans were allowed to rent or own their own dwellings in the town. Clifton House was almost certainly the first house built on the west side of Queen Street after the Great Ouse was diverted from Wisbech to Lynn probably in the 1260s.

### 7) Thoresby College

Cross to the west side of the street and visit Thoresby College entering through the fine wooden door of 1510. In the courtyard a slate plaque marks the line of the late 13th century quayside; in 1964 a timber wharf was excavated on this site to demonstrate how the river has moved west. Ships from Europe were amongst those loading and unloading at this location.

### 8) Saturday Market Place

This medieval space accommodated a chancel chapel and cemetery in the 14th century so the weekly market and annual summer fair must have hugged the buildings and extended into High Street. Lynn fair was one of the most important in the eastern counties and a major attraction for German amongst other European traders seeking wool and cloth especially.

### 9) Holy Trinity Guildhall

The impressive Holy Trinity Guildhall rebuilt in the 1420s was the home of Lynn's Great Guild of merchants whose membership embraced German residents in the town. In 1271 Simon Stavoren not only belonged to this powerful religious body but was an ambassador representing Lübeck merchants in England. Lynn's significance for Lübeck, leading the formation of the Hanseatic League at this time, is clear. The first German city on the Baltic, it was at the crossroads of North European commerce. It was not until the 1350s and 1360s that Danzig replaced Lübeck as the main trading partner of the Wash port.

In November 1473 the King's representatives stood in the Hall of this building to tell Lynn's merchant rulers about the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht (1474). This ended the Anglo-Hanseatic sea war which had commenced in 1468. Edward IV had agreed that the Germans could have a Kontor or trading post in the town and a local commission was set up to find appropriate premises. Walter Coney and Thomas Thoresby lived near the Saturday Market Place and used their influence to acquire an establishment for them in the vicinity. The Hanseatic merchants preferred King Street as already indicated but no suitable property was for sale there.

Lynn merchants were men of considerable wealth generated through overseas trade who dominated the Town Council as well as the Holy Trinity Guild. On the first floor of their Hall they congregated in groups or hanses which drove commercial operations in several parts of Europe including Prussia, Scania (southern Sweden),

