



## SUFFOLK DOG WALKS

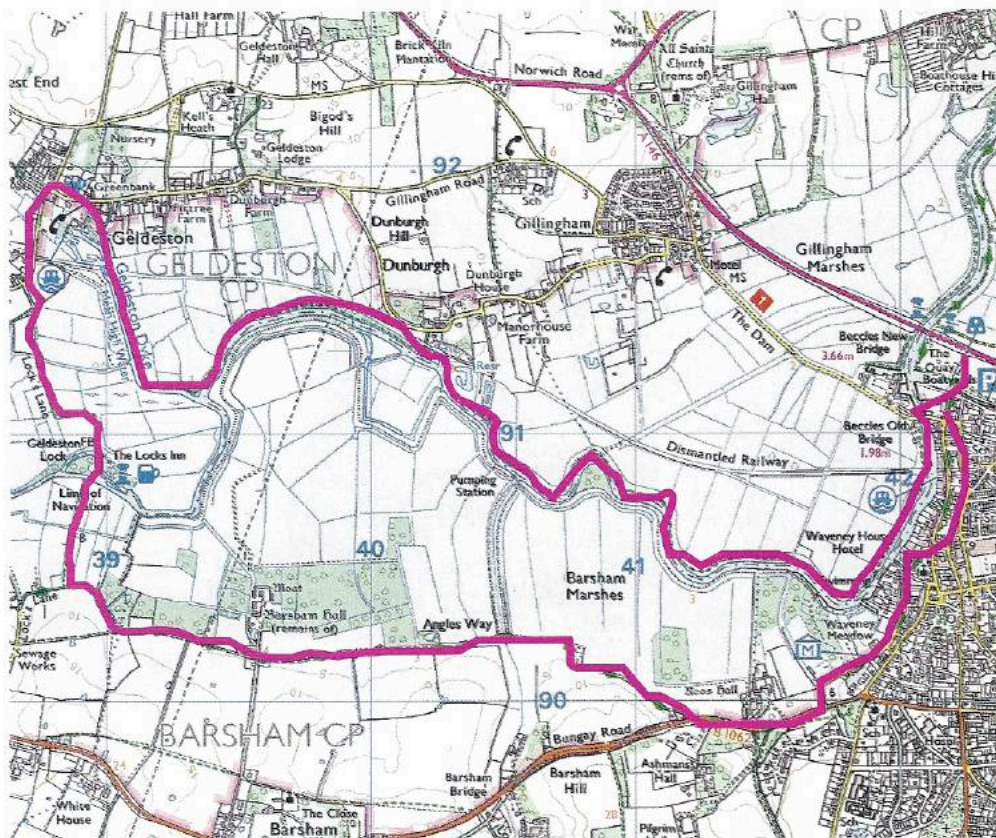
**Mike Trippitt** is a journalist who enjoys exploring the county, especially with his clumber spaniel, Farley

# Across the marshes

A Waveney Valley walk provides water features for Farley and a watering hole at renowned Geldeston Locks Inn



The flooded marshes



## HOW FAR?

Beccles Yacht Station to Geldeston Dyke	2.7 miles
Geldeston Dyke to Geldeston village	0.6 miles
Geldeston village to The Locks Inn	0.8 miles
The Locks Inn to Bungay Road	1.9 miles
Bungay Road to Beccles Yacht Station	1.2 miles
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.2 miles</b>

## NEAREST VETS

Coastline Veterinary Surgery	Foso House
Caxton Road	Beccles
NR34 9DP	T: 01502 470300
Three Rivers Veterinary Group	The Veterinary Clinic
London Road	Beccles
NR34 9YU	T: 01502 712169
Wherry Veterinary Group	Hillside Road East
Bungay	NR35 1RX
T: 01986 892771	

The most important ingredient of a good dog walk around Suffolk is a dog. Thereafter, the wonderful lanes, coast, riverbanks and countryside of this great county are high on the list.

We have brought Farley – the dog ingredient of our walk – to Beccles to enjoy the Waveney Valley. Today though, there's an extra ingredient. We're crossing the border into Norfolk.

Beccles has existed for centuries. There was a market here at the time of the Domesday Book, and a second market was flourishing by the 13th century. It exudes history. In the 1950s it became a boating

centre on the banks of The Waveney at the fringe of The Broads National Park. It is from Beccles yacht station that we set off, hoping, at least so far as two of us are concerned, to remain on terra ferma.

Once across the river we follow the riverbank south, past boats moored at small jetties. It's a good view of the town from here. Cottages overlook the river, and mature gardens sweep down to the water's edge.

Farley is full of life when he's off his lead in such a safe environment, and seems excited by what he can see and smell on the Norfolk-Suffolk border. His white fur, especially on his paws and legs, does not stay clean for long.

The riverside path here is muddy in winter. When the river level is high, water flows out in places over the path onto the marshes. We have to step through shin-high streams on occasions, so gumboots rather than usual walking boots were a sensible choice.

We see no-one on our way from Beccles to Geldeston Dyke, where we leave the banks of the Waveney and follow the path through trees to the village.

There's a lot of water about. Flooded fields to our right are dappled with spiked tufts of grass like islands in an ocean. Boats on the dyke sit high at their moorings. The silence is broken only rarely by a pheasant's rasping call and by the distant sound of a



A muddy Farley





The Wherry Inn, Geldeston

shooting party.

After walking through Geldeston, where we could have enjoyed lunch at The Wherry Inn, we follow Station Road past Three Rivers campsite, before turning down a quiet lane, across the marshes back to the river. Not far now to our psychological halfway point at famed Geldeston Lock.

Built in 1670 the lock became part of Geldeston parish comparatively recently. "It used to be called Shipmeadow Lock," says local historian John Crowfoot. "It's the first of three locks going up to Bungay, and it is the best preserved. They were made to allow wherries carrying salt, coal and Barley to get up to Bungay."

It closed to navigation in 1934, although the basin is now a public mooring. The lock gates have long gone, as has another structure erected to stop enthusiastic wherry men from sailing into the lock too quickly.

"There was a beam across the river," says John, "a sort of raised 'n' shape over the lock to stop the wherries going through unless they had taken their mast down. It made sure they came in slowly and were not in danger of doing any damage to the lock gates."

The renowned Locks Inn public house nestles beside the lock. It started life as the lock keeper's cottage, though it got its first public house licence in 1720. The landscape here has changed little since the 1800s. Inside, manager Jodie is on the phone. A customer has rung to check that floodwater and a high tide has not left the pub inaccessible before setting off. Jodie

confirms all is well. "Do you get those type of calls regularly?" I ask. "Yes," she says smiling. "We're a pub on a marsh." Though dogs are allowed in all parts of The Locks, we warn her that Farley is rather dirty and muddy before we bring him in.

"Don't worry about it," she says. "We're used to it. We're very dog friendly here." Just what we needed. So too was the good selection of ales, and some delicious, warming winter food.

Soon two more customers arrive and Jodie introduces us to Eric Wareham, who runs the ferry. Eric lives in Beccles and, although he's a full-time teacher, he finds time to run Big Dog Ferry, and to be a director of Beccles Lido Ltd which was set up to save the town's historic outdoor pool.

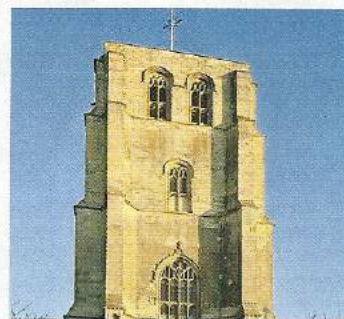
In the summer the ferry plies between the Lido and The Locks Inn. As well as giving passengers a boat trip on this pretty stretch of the river, it offers a choice of whether to return to Beccles on foot or by boat. For tired dogs and weary walkers Big Dog is a big help.

We chat to Eric for some time and get a real understanding of Beccles as a place to live, and its history. I mention the great view of Beccles Bell Tower and church from the Norfolk side of the river.

"But did you notice that the west side of the tower doesn't have a clock face?" asks Eric. I admit I hadn't noticed. "It's because Suffolk has no time for Norfolk," Eric says. He's joking, of course, and explains that there was little point in putting a clock facing out onto the marshes where no one could see it.

Whatever the reason, it's a good story, so

*'In summer the ferry plies between the Lido and The Locks Inn, giving passengers a boat trip and a choice of returning to Beccles on foot or by boat.'*



Beccles Bell Tower

when we get back to Beccles I look again at the bell tower of St Michael's church. Sure enough, its clock faces only north, south and east. Conspicuously, the tower is unattached to the knave, standing alone overlooking the town. Almost uniquely it is not at the west end.

But there's more to St Michael's than its fascinating design. It was at this church in 1759 that one Catherine Suckling married a local curate, Edmund Nelson. Nine years later, 60 miles away at Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk, they had a son, Horatio. History would regard him as England's greatest maritime hero.

Before walking through the churchyard we had found Lemn House, the home of Beccles and District Museum. Though built originally in the 1570s, its fine brick and flint facade and pan tiled roof date back to the 1760s. We learn that it was a school for nearly 300 years.

The museum will hold a series of exhibitions during 2020, the first beginning on April 1 when the museum re-opens to the public after the winter break. There are two parts to the exhibition says curator Alan Wheeler.

"There are reminiscences of people who were children in Beccles in the war years, how it affected them, their experiences and what they remember of 1939 to 1945." But he says there is a second part, Beccles Holiday Week 1943.

"In 1943 the national government was very conscious that everyone was working really hard in a stressful period, and that people wanted holidays. So towns were encouraged to do things in the first week of August, to effectively have a holiday without impacting on the war effort.

"Beccles was a place that had a holiday week, July 31 to August 6. We've managed to find a programme of all the events that went on in that week. There were things

aimed at children, but also adults as well."

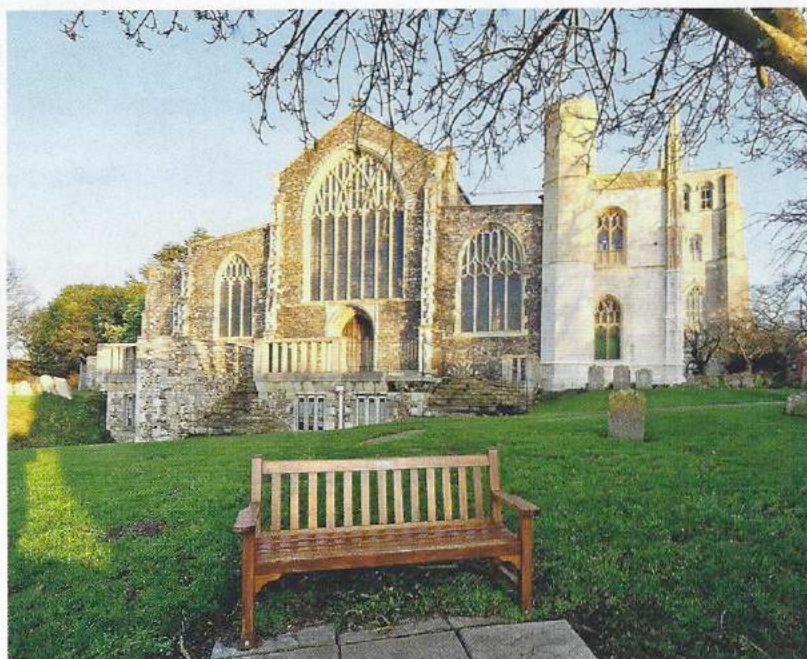
The light is fading and our limbs aching by the time we return to the car. Farley appears worn out and desperate to lie down on his blanket. We hear not a peep from him on the way home.

Beccles is a wonderful little town and Geldeston is a charming village. The Waveney Valley has given us a diverse, splendid walk, but it is the sense of community and the friendliness of the people we have spoken to that will last longest in the memory.

Later, when I begin to doze off on the sofa, it's not the website of the Clumber Spaniel Club or of Suffolk Churches that glows from my iPad. It is Rightmove. I wonder what it would cost to move to Beccles. . . ♦



Farley and Mike on Beccles Bridge



St Michael's church and bell tower, Beccles

## IN ASSOCIATION WITH LETHERINGHAM MILL COTTAGES

We love this month's walk. We tend to recommend places that are a little nearer to our guests but as so many people return to our cottages again and again we need to be able suggest places further afield. A day out exploring the banks of the River Waveney, along with a wander through Beccles is a lovely way to discover this part of Suffolk.

Our cottages provide the backdrop to the perfect romantic weekend away and not just in February. The county is full of wonderful romantic destinations and choosing just a few for a weekend visit isn't easy. No visit is complete without a trip to the coast so we suggest Aldeburgh and Southwold for some

sea air and shopping. If you are feeling brave and the weather is behaving, why not take a boat out on Thorpeness Meare? That would probably take care of Saturday and on Sunday.

You could venture further afield and explore Lavenham taking in one of its picturesque circular walks and marvelling at the medieval architecture. Returning home via Kentwell Hall would mean you wouldn't miss out on a romantic walk around the atmospheric, moated Tudor mansion whose gardens will take your breath away.

So don't save us just for Valentines. . . and don't forget the dogs are welcome too.

Happy February.

Jacqui Fairey and Richard Gooding

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