

The Story of Medieval Walden

The story of how the Saxon manor of Walden became medieval Chipping Walden and then Saffron Walden can be traced in its archaeological sites, street plan and medieval buildings. The Saxon name is recorded in the Domesday Book as Waledana and means 'valley of the Britons or serfs'. In Roman and Saxon times, there was a settlement along the King's Slade valley in the area of Abbey Lane, west of today's town centre. Excavations in the 19th century uncovered a late Saxon cemetery and evidence of people having lived nearby. By the Norman conquest, Walden was a large manor owned by Asgar, one of the most powerful Saxon thanes. Asgar retained his estates after 1066, but William I later confiscated them and gave Asgar's lands to the Norman Geoffrey de Mandeville. Asgar was imprisoned and died in captivity in France around 1085. In the Domesday Book (1086), Walden was valued at £50 with 147 households, including 14 freemen and 20 slaves.

In 1140, Geoffrey's grandson, Geoffrey de Mandeville II, became Earl of Essex and made Walden the centre for his Essex estates. Earl Geoffrey built his castle on the hill overlooking the Saxon village. In 1141 the Empress Maud granted him the right to move the local market from Newport in the Cam valley to Walden. A bank and ditch round the hilltop enclosed the castle and space for the church and market to the west. Like many barons, Geoffrey exploited the conflict between King Stephen and the Empress Maud. He was later held prisoner by Stephen and most of his lands were confiscated. Geoffrey then went into rebellion in the Fens and set fire to Cambridge. He was fatally wounded in a skirmish at Burwell, Cambridgeshire in 1144. Walden Castle changed hands a number of times during the rest of the 12th century.

In 1226 the manor of Walden passed to the de Bohuns, Earls of Essex and Hereford. They remodelled the castle site and laid out a new town with an extensive market south of the hilltop. All this and more land was enclosed by the Great Ditch and the surviving part is now known as the Battles Ditches. By 1328, the town was known as Chipping (Market) Walden.

Walden took time to develop fully as a market centre, but by the early 1400s it was prospering from the wool and cloth trade and cultivation of the saffron crocus. Saffron was prized chiefly as a medicine, though also used in dyeing and cooking. The name Saffron Walden is first recorded in the Tudor period.

Further Information

Places to visit and to find out more about medieval Walden

Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre
1 Market Place, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1HR
Telephone: 01799 524002
tourism@saffronwalden.gov.uk
www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk

Saffron Walden Museum
Museum Street, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1BN
Telephone: 01799 510333
museum@uttlesford.gov.uk
www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org
See our website for current opening hours & admission charges

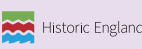
Gibson Library (formerly Saffron Walden Town Library)
2 King Street, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1ES
Telephone: 0345 603 7628
(Switchboard - ask for Saffron Walden Gibson Library)
society@gibsonlibrary.org.uk
www.gibsonlibrary.org.uk

The Castle (next to the Museum) and **Battle Ditches** can be viewed at any time on foot.

St Mary's Parish Church
www.stmaryssaffronwalden.org

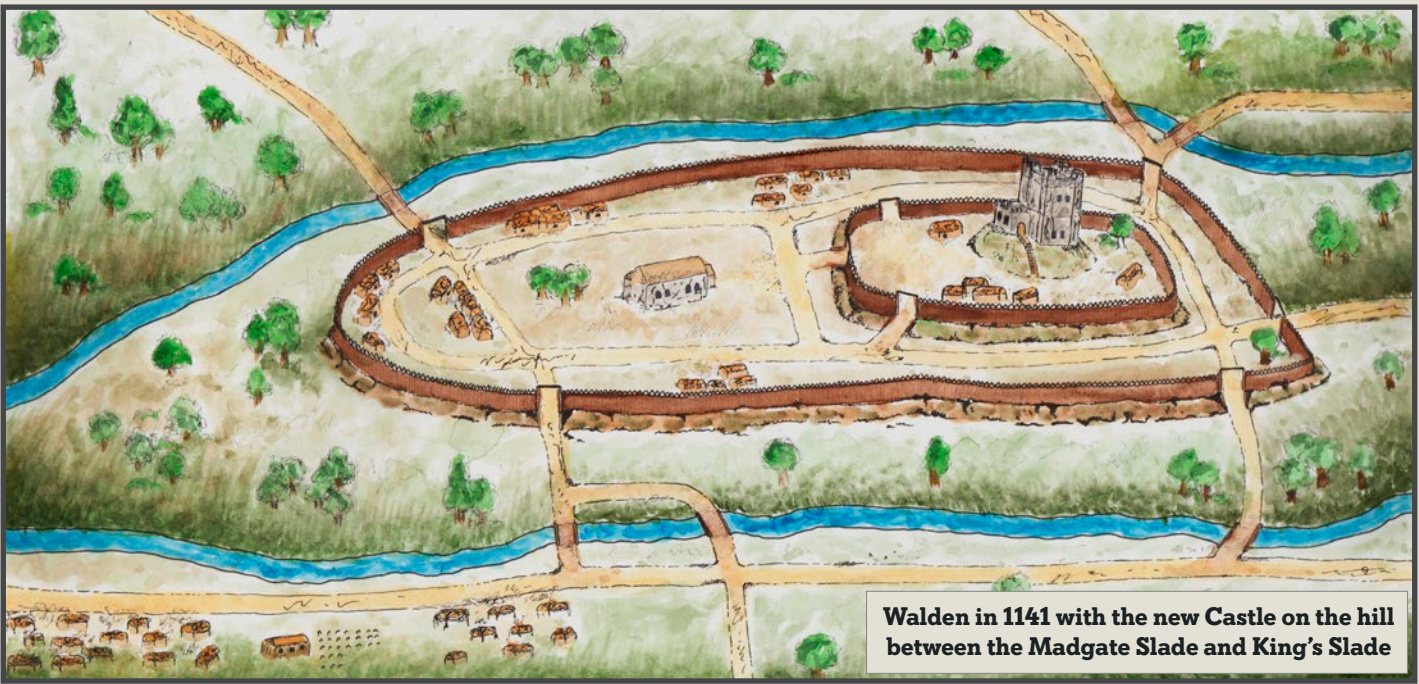
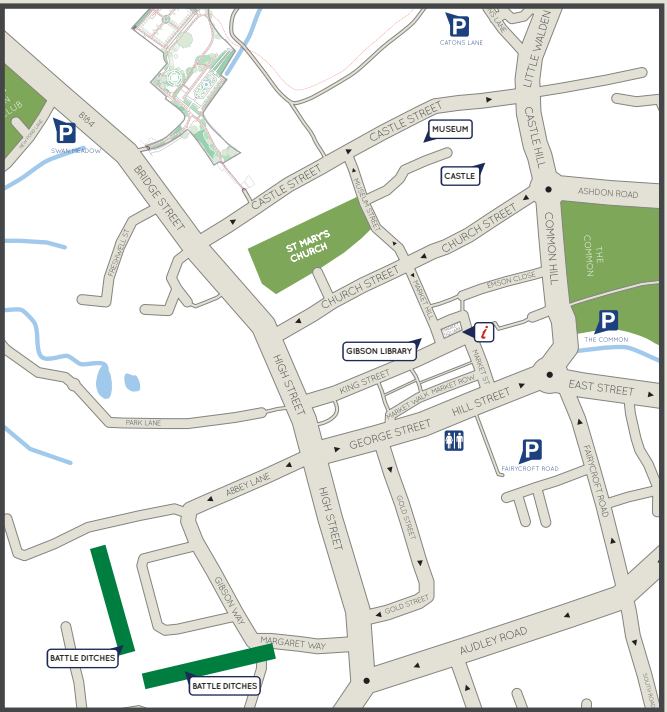
Want to know more about medieval Walden?
Follow this link for a list of further resources
www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk/explore-saffron-walden/battle-ditches/

Saffron Walden Heritage Development Group Project supported by



Photography, Graphic Design & Printing by Fraser Parry
www.fraserparryphotography.co.uk
Illustration by Jack Palmer

Town Map & Parking



① **Later history of the Castle bailey.** After 1226 the de Bohuns made changes to the site. Later records hint that the bailey was divided and there was a stone manor house south of the Museum, barns, byres and other buildings. In 1347 Humphrey de Bohun gained permission to fortify the site with a wall. Archaeologists have found traces of wall foundations which suggests the bailey was remodelled at this time. After 1362, the site was owned by the Crown and leased out to townsmen. By 1400, there were so many dyeworks bordering the west end of the bailey that it became known as Tointeres (cloth dyers) Hill.

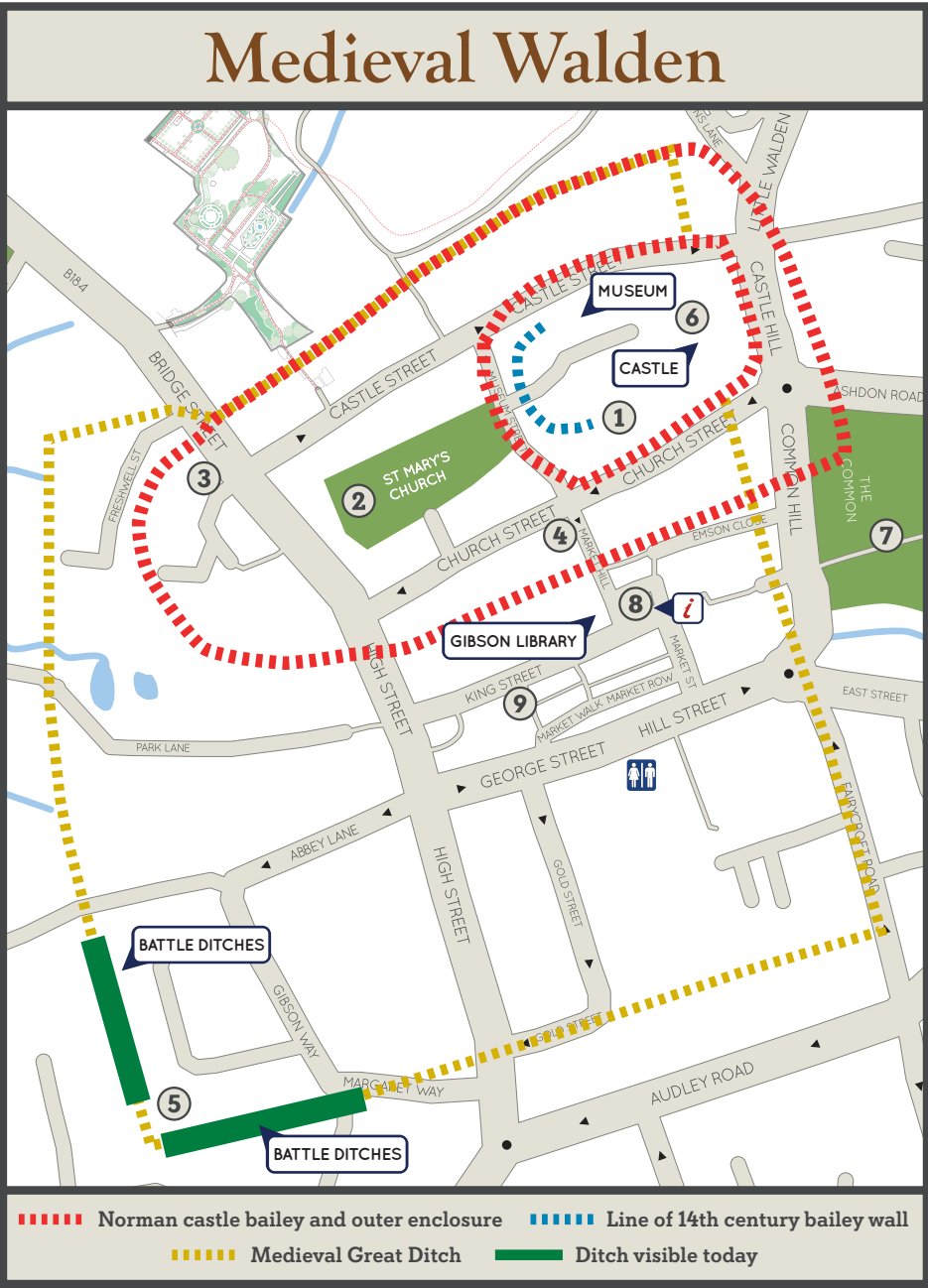
② **Parish Church of St Mary and Norman Cross-shaft.** The present church is the second or third on this site. A church may have existed in the Saxon settlement off Abbey Lane, but it is likely that Geoffrey de Mandeville built a new church on the hill next to his castle. The market granted in 1141 could have been west of the church. If so, this Norman church was completely replaced in the 13th century. The church was reconstructed between 1450 and 1525 on an even grander scale and still stands as a symbol of Walden's wealth in the late Middle Ages. Part of a stone cross-shaft dating from the 11th century is built into the east wall of the south porch.

③ **Medieval shopfront, 1 Myddylton Place.** Late 15th-century hall house with a shop-front on Bridge Street. Another shop and storeroom were added along 1 Myddylton Place, with a hall (possibly a guildhall) above. It was later converted into a maltings.



④ **The Old Sun Inn, Church Street.** 29-31 and 25-27 were originally two 14th-century hall houses. They were altered in the 17th century when the wagon arch was created and the exterior decorated with moulded plasterwork (pargeting).

⑤ **Battle Ditches and site of Saxon settlement.** This was the area of the Saxon settlement, which continued until the early 13th century when the de Bohuns imposed a new town layout. The Great Ditch formed the new town boundary and this is the only section to survive above ground. The names Battle Ditches or Repell Ditches were given to it much later. Interpretation boards on site provide further information. The Battle Ditches are a Scheduled Monument.



Walden Abbey was founded in 1139-43 by Geoffrey de Mandeville II as a Benedictine priory, dedicated to St Mary & St James. Relations between the Priory and the castle's occupants later deteriorated, with disputes over land. In 1190 Richard I raised the Priory to an Abbey. Walden Abbey and its satellite village of Brook Walden (now Audley End village) played an important part in Walden's story until the Dissolution. The Abbey site lies under Audley End House.

⑥ **Walden Castle** was probably built around 1140 by Geoffrey de Mandeville II. The basement of the keep survives with part of the great hall above. Originally there was at least one further storey of private chambers and an earth mound around the basement. The turret is an 18th-century addition. The castle changed hands many times during the civil wars of the 12th century. In 1157 Henry II ordered its defences to be pulled down, although it may have been refortified soon after. By Tudor times the keep had fallen into disuse and was being robbed for building materials. Walden Castle is a Scheduled Monument.



⑦ **The Common,** formerly known as Castle Green, is registered as a village green and is not common land.

⑧ **The medieval Market Place** was originally a large area extending southwards to the King's Slade (Hill Street / George Street). On the north side stood the Lord of the Manor's malt mill and the corn market. Other medieval buildings which have now disappeared included a Guildhall at the junction of King Street and the Market Place, and the Woolstaplers' Hall nearby.



Market Rows. In the southern part of the market temporary stalls were eventually replaced by rows of permanent shops. Butcher Row, Market Row and Mercers Row preserve the lines of medieval market stalls, grouped by trade.

⑨ **Medieval shopfront, 17-21 King Street.** 15th-century merchant's hall house with shops on the ground floor. It is a rare survival of a medieval timber-framed shop front, on a prominent corner.

Area of medieval gardens and smallholdings. The southern part of the town was not developed much, except for the High Street and Gold Street. It provided the townspeople with land to grow food and keep animals. Late medieval records refer to pigs, cows and sheep escaping and damaging property, including valuable crocus gardens! The growing of saffron crocuses may have begun in the 14th century, but the earliest record of saffron crocuses in Walden dates from 1444.

