

AYLSHAM WORKHOUSE



2 miles



Hand hoeing the fields surrounding the workhouse at Aylsham.
Image courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.

This walk follows a high-banked section of Marriott's Way through woodland, then drops down via a slope onto quiet cul de sacs and Green Lane to complete your circuit.

Emerging from behind mature beech, oak and chestnut trees, you'll pass a prominent building that would have piqued rail passenger's interest; Aylsham Workhouse. According to a British Medical Journal report from 1894-5, *'The workhouse belonging to this Union presents a palatial appearance; it is a modern red brick building, with two wings and a central block, standing in well-kept gardens, and, as seen from the railway, might easily be mistaken for the residence of a county magnate.'*

This grand, imposing building was designed by Norfolk-born architect William J. Donthorn. He also designed workhouses at Downham, Erpingham, Freebridge, Lynn and Swaffham, but the buildings at Aylsham are the only ones that survive.

The workhouse was built in 1849 to accommodate up to 600 people; although the report stated that the number of inmates never reached much higher than 130. The workhouse later became St. Michael's Hospital. This closed in 2005 allowing the buildings to be converted into luxurious homes.

Another prominent building that would have been visible from the railway was Aylsham Towermill. Used to produce flour, it was a victim of lightning storms; in the 1890s it was damaged and never repaired. The current jagged outline of the top of the tower was caused by an abandoned attempt to demolish it, but the building was far better built than expected.

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Square: the frontage of the old Aylsham Workhouse. Circle: a goldfinch.

The green corridor of trees that now line the route of Marriott's Way today are a haven for wildlife. When it operated as a railway, however, passengers travelling along the elevated track from the west would have had uninterrupted views over the countryside to the south, and Aylsham to the north.



Good to Know: Start at the car park by Mileham Drive, NR11 6WE (access from B1145), or join from the east from the Bure Valley Railway, NR11 6BW (+1 mile). There are regular buses to Aylsham from Cromer and Norwich.

Aylsham has many eateries and independent shops to enjoy.

The route is suitable for all, including for those with pushchairs.

