



◀ The monk sculptures in the centre of the Market Square provide a reminder of the Priory.

The Alfred Jewel can be found at the centre of the decoration of the Mayoral Chains for the Town. ▼



## TRAILS AROUND THE TOWN

# The Lost Priory of St Neots



## The Lost Priory of St Neots

The town of St Neots owes its name to a priory that held the bones of St Neot. The priory was dissolved by Henry VIII, the building materials sold and today there is very little to see, leaving people to wonder -

Where was the Priory?

What did the Priory look like?

Who was St Neot?

What is the link with a village in Cornwall?

### Some further questions might be -

Who planned the size and position of the market square?

Why does the town have a pebble mosaic in the market square and what does it show?

What has been the town's symbol for over 100 years and is on the Mayor's chain?

**We hope that this trail around the Priory site will help to answer these and other questions about the town.**

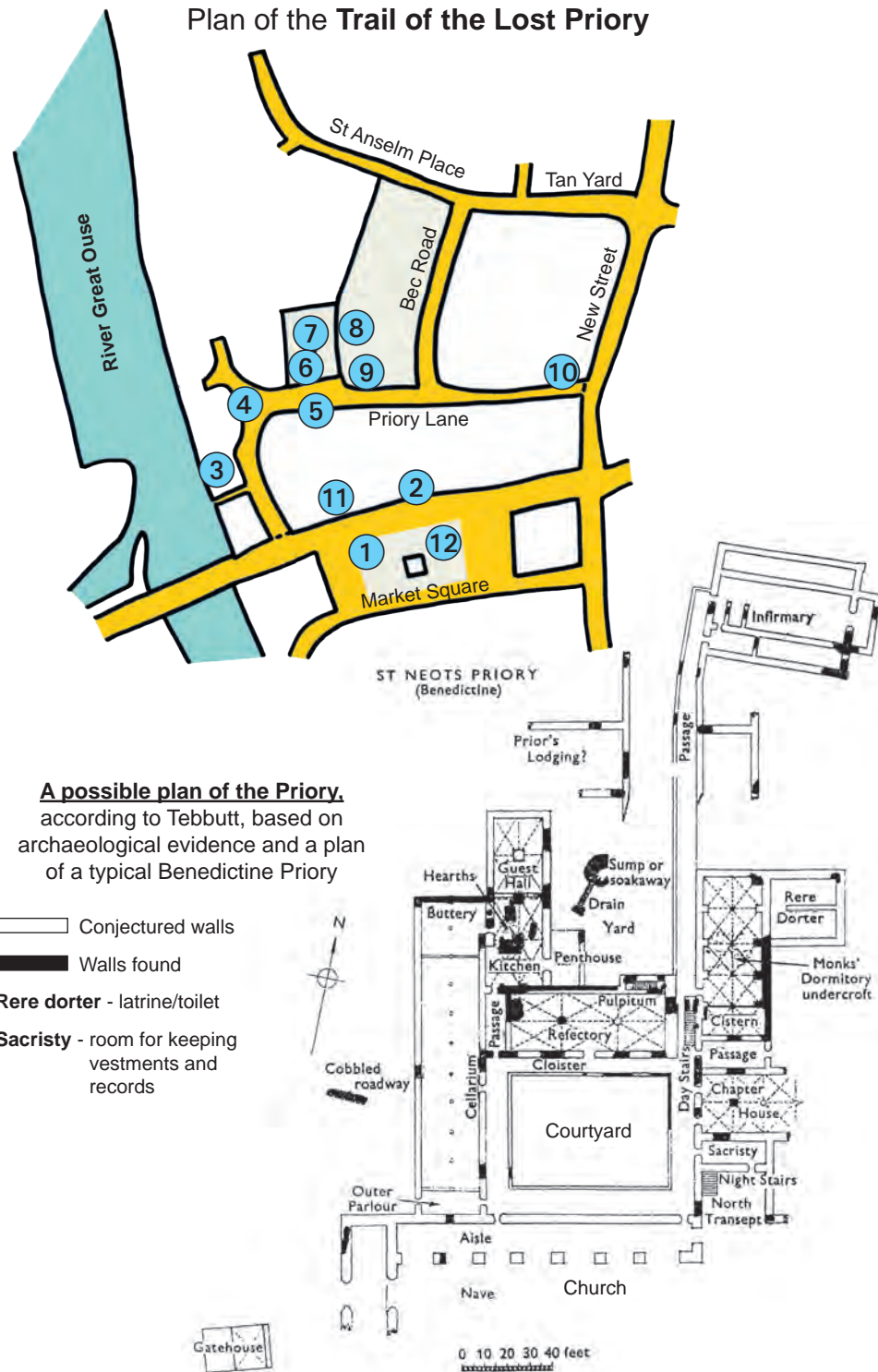
Please open for map 

Find out about the Priory and how the town got its name

Front cover: (1) a picture of a similar priory beside a river  
(2) the seal of St Neots Priory, depicting the Virgin and Child with Neot kneeling (from G.C. Gorham's history of St Neots, 1820)



## Plan of the Trail of the Lost Priory



## Trail of the Lost Priory

Distance about ½ mile

Start at the pebble mosaic on the west side of the Market Square, opposite Cross Keys Mews.



**1 Mosaic** – This mosaic of the Alfred Jewel was once thought to depict the figure of St Neot, whose bones were brought as relics to the Saxon Priory in Eynesbury Parish. The jewel became the symbol for the town – see page 5 for more information about the mosaic and St Neot.

The earliest priory may have been on a site at the other end of the High Street (perhaps near the present parish church).

**2 North side of Market Square** – these shops and former inns grew up just outside the wall of the Norman Priory. The market square was laid out by the monks and a river crossing made at this point so that monks could control access and collect tolls. A weekly market was granted on Thursdays by King Henry I in 1135 (reaffirmed in 1137).

**Walk past the Bridge House into Priory Lane to find the plaque on the middle of the 3 houses on the left.**

**3 Priory Gatehouse** – a local Brewer, John Day, had the Priory Gatehouse demolished to enable better access to his Brewery in 1814. The plaque records where the gatehouse once stood.

Stand in the road with your back to the river and imagine the Priory wall stretching away in front of you behind the shops.

**Continue along Priory Lane to find The Priory (left) and Priory House (facing).** These properties were built on the Priory site as part of Fowler's brewery (1780-1814).

**4 Corner of Priory Lane** – with your back to 'The Priory' look towards the car parks. In front of you would have been the Priory Church with the tower thought by Tebbutt, a local historian, to be at the west end facing you and to the left Priory buildings where the monks lived and worked.

**Walk a short way along the lane towards Waitrose.**

**5 Stand at the back of Cross Keys Mews** – you are now probably standing on the northern part of the Priory Church. The mural shows the Priory plan on the left and the later brewery buildings on the right.

1539	Dissolution. Prior & 7 monks given pensions. Priory lands distributed to non-religious owners who sold off the building materials.
1600s-1700s	Priory site used for industry including Eayres Bell Foundry and Atwood's and then Arnold's brewery.
1780	William Fowler buys the brewery and develops the site.
1814	John Day buys brewery, demolishes the gatehouse and builds many new buildings.
1919	Jordan and Addington, a local seed and grain merchants, buys the brewery buildings.
1962	Jordan and Addington sells their property.
1958 – 1980s	RF Developments factory on much of the site now covered by the large Waitrose car park.
1980s	Part of the priory site redeveloped with a purpose built library, an entertainment and conference centre (Priory Centre) and council offices. The barley kiln is renovated, updated and becomes a snooker club for several years.

### The names live on

Links with the mediaeval Priory live on with the names of buildings on the Priory site, in local road names and other places in the town –

- **Priory Lane** – leading from the Market Square to the Priory (access now closed from the square)
- **Priory Road** – leading from New Street into Priory land
- **Bec Road** – the Priory was allied to the Abbey of Bec in Normandy
- **St Anselm Place** – named after Bishop Anselm who examined the relics of St Neot
- **Priory Park** – a large park in the NE of the town
- **Priory Park Infants School and Priory Junior School**

### Bibliography -

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- The History and Antiquities of Eynesbury and St Neot's in Huntingdon; and of St Neot's in the County of Cornwall, Gorham
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- www.saintneot.church (website of St Neot's church, Cornwall)

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