



Martyrs Cottage
Church Road | East Bilney | Norfolk | NR20 4HN

 FINE & COUNTRY

GRANDEUR AND GRACE



Dating from around 1485, this enchanting three-bedroom Grade II listed Tudor home blends more than five centuries of history with modern versatility.

Nestling in the peaceful hamlet of East Bilney, it also features a beautifully appointed and immaculately presented two-bedroom annexe cottage with a thriving holiday letting record.



KEY FEATURES

- A Wonderful 15th Century Period Home in a Popular Village Location
- Exceptional Character Features include Handmade Oak Doors, Carved Beams and Flagstone Floors
- Three Characterful Bedrooms plus Study
- Three Inglenooks and Two Log Burners
- Magnificent Formal Dining Hall
- Freestanding Nickel-Plated Bath in Oak-Panelled Bathroom
- Detached Annexe Cottage with Two Bedrooms and Two Bathrooms
- Established Airbnb Income with 80 Five Star Reviews
- South Facing Tiered Gardens with Pond, Stream and Topiary
- Driveway Parking for Four Vehicles
- The Accommodation extends to 2,723 sq.ft
- EPC: Not Required

Few homes combine such a rich architectural history with the flexibility of a self-contained annexe cottage, ideal for multigenerational living, running your own business or continuing an established holiday let.

Background

"Our house has always given us joy; from the first day we viewed it, we knew it was the home for us," the owners said when asked what first drew them to the property. "It is so full of character and history." "Built in approximately 1485, it is thought that Thomas Bilney was born in the house in 1495. One of the first British martyrs, he was burned at the stake in Norwich in 1531, and hence the name, 'Martyr's Cottage'." Bilney became an early and influential voice of the English Reformation, and he is commemorated both in a stained-glass window at St Mary's church and in the village sign, whose design was taken from it. The owners noted that the house was probably once owned by a wealthy merchant, given the extensive use of brick and the detailed carved beams, and archive photographs of Martyr's Cottage are held by Historic England. Extensively renovated in the 1980s, the house retains its carved staircases, flagstone floors and magnificent fireplaces.

Room By Room

The front door sets the tone before you have even crossed the threshold, centuries-old oak hung on hand-wrought ironwork, and what lies beyond does not disappoint. Flagstones run underfoot through the ground floor, beneath a latticework of gnarled and honeyed timbers, and there are three great inglenook hearths and two log burners for the colder months. Just as the hearths hold the warmth in winter, the flagstones and stout timbered walls keep the interior naturally cool through the height of summer – a home as comfortable in a heatwave as it is at Christmas.





KEY FEATURES

To one side, the sitting room is made for firelight and long evenings, its finely roll-moulded beams overhead and a snug alcove tucked to one corner, while the kitchen is a warm, homely space, fitted with French hand-carved oak cupboards and open shelving, with room for a table at its centre. From here you pass into the undoubted showpiece, the dining hall, a chamber where a herringbone-bricked hearth, carved staircase and soaring oak framing conjure feasts from another age. “It has always had a feeling of great warmth, whether it’s just the two of us or the whole family,” the owners remarked. The practicalities are neatly tucked away, with a laundry room off the dining hall, a roomy, smartly tiled wet room and a boot room handily placed at the side entrance. Old oak boards continue overhead, where the first floor holds the principal bedroom, with its own inglenook fireplace, half-tester bed and walk-in wardrobe, a further bedroom or study, and a family bathroom that few homes could match, where a freestanding nickel-plated bath gleams against aged oak panelling, accompanied by a wonderfully ornate basin. Two more bedrooms nestle among the trusses on the floor above, the ancient brick chimney rising through the heart of the house.

Improvements & Refinements

“We have not wanted to change the main house, although we have carried out a few alterations to enhance it, including installing period cast iron radiators, altering the kitchen and wet room area to give more floor space. And we have had extensive work done to the roofing, sourcing all the tiles so they are in keeping with the house,” the owners explained. Theirs has been a gentle, sympathetic stewardship of this historic home.

The Annexe

Beyond the main house lies the fully self-contained two-bedroom, two-bathroom annexe cottage, with its own entrance, sitting/dining room and kitchen. Finishing the annexe was the owners’ first project when they moved in, and it has proved a resounding success, comfortably accommodating their large family on visits while also earning its keep as a holiday home, one that has introduced them to many interesting people and provided a good second income. Listed on Airbnb with a proven track record of 80 five-star reviews and Airbnb Superhost status, it benefits from efficient electric heating, separate electric metering and a separate water isolating valve, while the garden is easily cordoned off for guests’ usage.

By pacing their bookings, the owners note, the letting has never once intruded on their own lives, an arrangement that has suited them perfectly. “The annexe could also be used as separate office space with its lovely garden views, a permanent granny/teenage annexe, or a combination thereof,” they added.





KEY FEATURES

Favourite Spaces

"Our favourite room is the dining hall; it is a beautiful reception area to the house and accommodates a large gathering around our extended dining table. We have often seated sixteen people and we've loved every moment," the owners replied when asked about their favourite spaces at Martyr's Cottage. "The house is just beautiful at Christmas with two cosy log burners and lots of candles; it is magical. We bring in seasonal foliage from the garden, and dress it very traditionally," they added.

The Outside

The gardens wrap around the cottage on every side, and the owners' care shows in each of them. To the south, the ground falls away in terraces threaded with fruit trees, clipped topiary and unexpectedly exotic tree ferns, and a pond fed by a small stream, lit after dark, makes an idyllic spot for breakfast, evening drinks and meals in the open air. A bespoke summerhouse with a cedar-shingle roof completes the picture. "The garden has had extensive work done to it to allow in more light, and many new shrubs have been introduced. There is sun somewhere in the garden all day and it teems with bird life. It is a picture both in spring and summer. There is a useful flat area which has often accommodated an extended gazebo for outside entertaining. We regularly have pheasant roaming in the garden," the owners said. At the front, a tall hedge screens a second garden from the lane, and the driveway provides off street parking for four vehicles.

On Leaving

When asked what they will miss most, they replied that they would miss their neighbours greatly, and that were it not for personal reasons they would definitely not be leaving. "It has been a privilege to live in such an historic home; the hamlet has some of the nicest neighbours. We shall be truly sad to leave such a wonderful, relaxed lifestyle, we hope we can get comfort from knowing that the new owners will embrace it and love it as much as we have."

East Bilney sits quietly in the mid-Norfolk countryside, a small hamlet with a notable place in England's religious history. The medieval church of St Mary, Grade II listed and largely rebuilt by the Victorians, holds a stained-glass memorial to Thomas Bilney, and the village sign was modelled on that very window, a daily reminder of the cottage's most famous son. "It is a very quiet neighbourhood with excellent neighbours," the owners said. "The local area has amazing walks – our regular route is through the church grounds, following the stream which has an abundance of snowdrops and primroses in the spring. We then head back through a small woodland that is a vibrant carpet of blue at bluebell time. The birdsong is wonderful, especially the skylarks that hover over the fields, and we regularly see muntjac, deer, partridge and pheasants."













The Annexe













INFORMATION



On The Doorstep

"We have one of the best award-winning gastro pub/restaurants, The Brisley Bell, and a few other eating options close by: a Thai restaurant just minutes away, with two other pub/restaurants quite near and a couple of local village shops ten minutes away," the owners said. "There are also excellent local markets providing lots of local produce plus fresh fish and local cheeses." Beetley, the neighbouring village, has a pre-school, primary school and village hall, and North Elmham adds a post office, GP surgery and convenience shop. For bigger errands, Dereham and Fakenham each offer supermarkets, independent shops, leisure facilities and regular farmers' markets, with Fakenham Racecourse, Pensthorpe Natural Park and the Thursford Collection within easy reach. Norwich, just under 20 miles away and named overall winner of The Sunday Times Best Places to Live 2026, offers its magnificent cathedral, medieval streets and a thriving cultural scene.

How Far Is It To?

East Bilney lies approximately 8 miles south of Fakenham and 5 miles northwest of Dereham, where the A47 provides main road connections towards Norwich, King's Lynn and beyond. The north Norfolk coast, with favourite destinations such as Wells-next-the-Sea and Holkham, is around 25 minutes' drive away. Norwich, just over 22 miles to the southeast and around 40 minutes by car, offers a mainline rail link to London Liverpool Street together with an international airport, while King's Lynn, some 24 miles to the west, provides a regular rail service to London King's Cross.

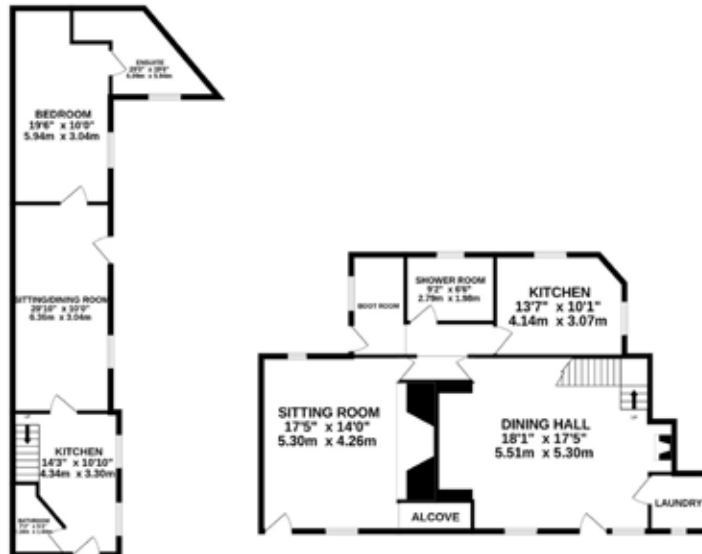
Directions

Leave Fakenham on the B1146 signposted to Dereham and continue south, passing through the village of Brisley. On meeting the B1145 after approximately 6.6 miles, turn right and then take the first left into Fakenham Road and continue straight ahead as it enters East Bilney. Take the left turning into Church Road and after a short distance the property will be found on the left-hand side.

Services, District Council and Tenure

Oil-Fired Central Heating to Main House, Electric Heating to Annexe, Mains Water, Mains Electricity, Private Drainage to Septic Tank
Broadband Available - please see www.openreach.com/fibre-checker
Mobile Phone Reception - varies depending on network provider
Please see www.checker.ofcom.org.uk
Breckland District Council - Council Tax Band: F
Freehold

GROUND FLOOR
1580 sq.ft. (146.8 sq.m.) approx.



1ST FLOOR
753 sq.ft. (69.9 sq.m.) approx.



2ND FLOOR
390 sq.ft. (36.2 sq.m.) approx.



TOTAL FLOOR AREA : 2723 sq.ft. (253.0 sq.m.) approx.

Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure the accuracy of the floorplan contained here, measurements of doors, windows, rooms and any other items are approximate and no responsibility is taken for any error, omission or mis-statement. This plan is for illustrative purposes only and should be used as such by any prospective purchaser. The services, systems and appliances shown have not been tested and no guarantee as to their operability or efficiency can be given.
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