



ABBAY OF ST EDMUND HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP

Could 2020 be a year of discovery for the Abbey of St Edmund?

The history of St Edmund and the Abbey built in his honour captures the imagination but even more of its past could be discovered in 2020 and beyond.

Next year will see community celebrations and other events held in Bury St Edmunds to mark 1000 years since the foundation of the Abbey of St Edmund by King Canute.

As part of the special year, the Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership will be applying for grant funding that would, if successful, enable it to gain a better understanding of the structures, artefacts and other links to the Abbey's medieval past that may lie beneath a large part of the Abbey of St Edmund area.

It hopes to do this through a geophysical scan – a way of seeing what's buried without disturbing the ground.

In preparation for the Abbey 1000 celebrations, the tarmac on the old redundant tennis courts will be removed in late January.

The Reverend Canon Matthew Vernon from St Edmundsbury Cathedral, chairman of the Heritage Partnership, said: "We want to find out more about the archaeology and history of the Abbey of St Edmund to help us tell more of the story of St Edmund and the Abbey to local people and visitors. There has been lots of speculation and excitement about the possibility that St Edmund, the martyred King of East Anglia and first patron saint of England, may be buried within the abbey grounds. It has captured the hearts and imaginations of local residents and the thousands of visitors who come to the Abbey each year. The simple answer is that none of us knows about that with any certainty.

"A first stage scan of the former Abbey of St Edmund would focus around the site of King Canute's rotunda, which was built just after the foundation of the of the Abbey in 1020. While it would also include the site of the former tennis courts, its purpose is about researching and discovering more about what structures, artefacts and other links to the Abbey's medieval past may lie

beneath a much larger part of the former Abbey. All of this will in turn help develop people's understanding of this internationally significant heritage."

Subject to funding, the Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership hopes that the first stage of the scan could take place during next year.

In the meantime work is progressing on new tennis courts at the former Eastgate Nurseries within the Abbey Gardens. The new courts are expected to open in the summer.

The Abbey Gardens represents just a third of the former Abbey of St Edmund site which stretches across as far as St Mary's Church, the Vinefields and the water meadows. The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership was set up to help protect and conserve the entire Abbey of St Edmund area and to develop greater public understanding of its archaeological, historical, architectural and religious significance.

Cllr Joanna Rayner, West Suffolk Council Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture said: "We and our communities are immensely proud of our history and heritage in West Suffolk and 2020 offers the potential opportunity not just to celebrate 1000 years of the Abbey, but also to gain even more of an understanding of the Abbey of St Edmund area. We already know that the Abbey played a key role in establishing Magna Carta and the shaping of modern democracy – who knows what we will discover in 2020."

The Heritage Partnership is led by St Edmundsbury Cathedral in collaboration with West Suffolk Council and representatives of Suffolk County Council, Bury St Edmunds Town Council, Historic England, English Heritage, the University of East Anglia, the University of Suffolk, the Bury Society and several local community groups as well as specialist planners, architects, historians and archaeologists.