

## 5

OF BURY ST  
EDMUNDS'  
SPOOKIEST  
LOCATIONS

*according to a local expert*

John Saunders shares some of his favourite paranormal hotspots. By Danielle Lett

One of Suffolk's oldest towns, Bury St Edmunds has a rich history that goes back hundreds of years. And it's this town's fascinating heritage that inspired former police officer John Saunders to become a tour guide in the very place he knows and loves.

And every year, John will don his most macabre funeral attire and take groups around the town to show curious visitors some of its scariest, bloodiest, and spookiest hotspots.

Explaining how he fell into his new career, he says: "I became a tour guide about five years ago after my colleagues suggested it to me. I already had an interest in the town and its wonderful history, and the 1,000-year anniversary of the Abbey is a stark reminder of what Bury had to offer all those years - and what we have today. It was magnificent in terms of size, political importance, and beauty."

After embarking upon on a year-long intensive training course, John became a fully-qualified tour guide - and he hasn't looked back.

**RIGHT:**  
Tour guide John  
Saunders in Bury St  
Edmunds

Pictures:  
CHARLOTTE BOND

**BELOW:**  
The Nutshell pub

Picture: ARCHANT

And there's nothing John loves more than showing people a side of Bury they may not be familiar with.

"This year, we've seen the re-emergence of people coming to visit from abroad, which is good news for us. We've had people come from across places such as Europe, America, Asia, and Africa - we even had a group visit us from New Zealand, after they'd read about our tours in a magazine. People who come to Bury St Edmunds are always fascinated by its quaintness, history, and beauty."

But when the sun goes down, things get a bit spookier, as John and his team of tour guides unearth the more ghostly and macabre side of town.

Typically running on a Friday night, John and his team have been so overwhelmed with demand that they're extending the tours all the way through to March.

So where are some of the hotspots John takes people on his 90-minute tour?

"We will start off at Moyses' Hall before making our way to the Buttermarket and Cornhill, where I will discuss some of the various premises that have played host to poltergeist activity."

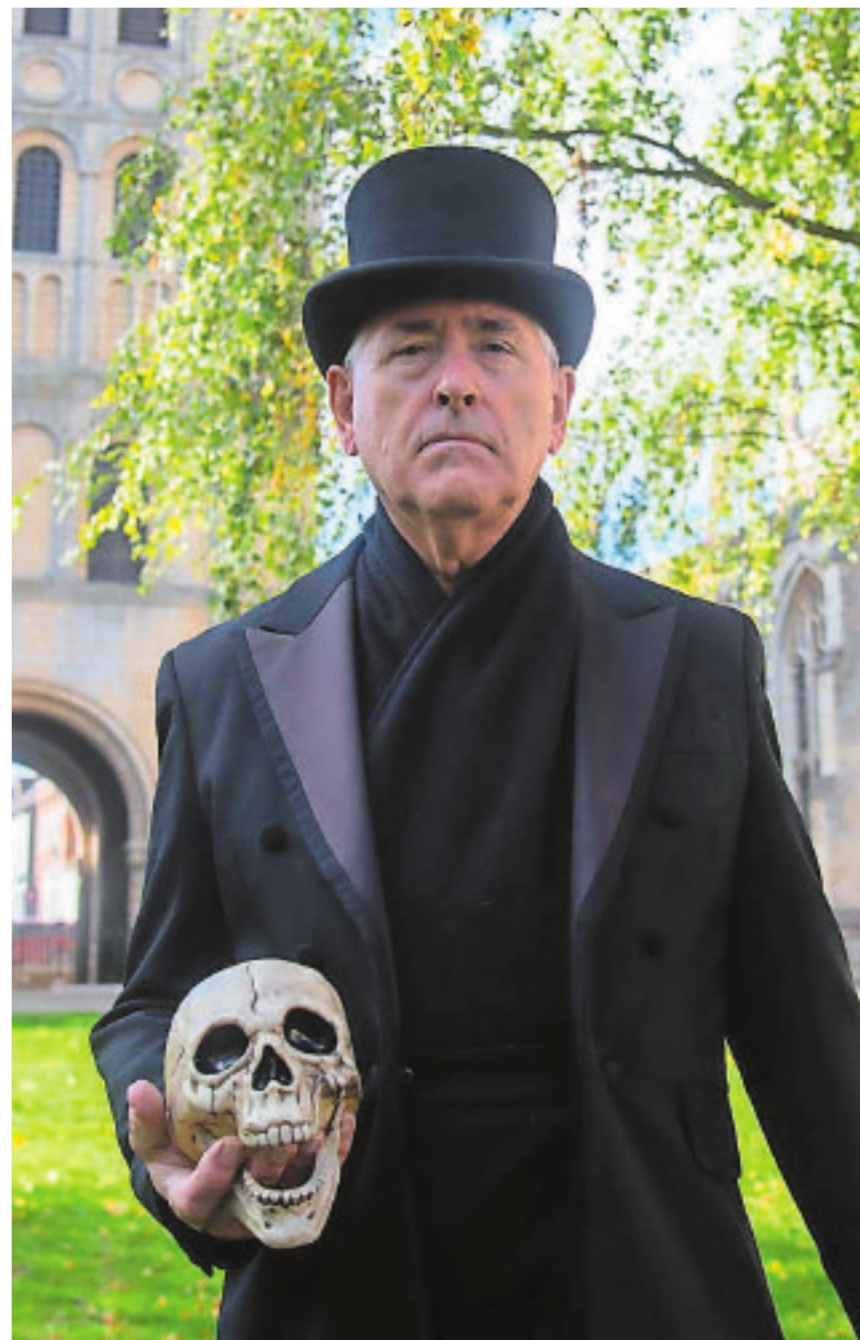
For anyone unaware, Moyses Hall was once a workhouse, police station, and gaol - but today is a popular museum known for its collections related to murder, witchcraft and the paranormal. Stories of terror go all the way back to the 14th century, with a woman reported to have seen 'a most horrible devil' in the cellar.

Most famously perhaps, Moyses' Hall is linked with the infamous Red Barn murder that took place in 1827. Murderer William Corder was hanged in the town a year later for this crimes, and parts of his body can be found in the museum.

A death mask was created, and his skin was tanned and used to bind a book which documented the grizzly tale.

In 1828, shrieks and apparitions were reported after Corder was hung - and these only stopped when his skull was finally buried.

"It's very gruesome listening, and really sets the tone for the



evening," adds John.

As the guides and their groups make their way through town, they ensure they stop off at Skinner Street - often dubbed 'the only real medieval street left in Bury St Edmunds'.

"Its name doesn't leave too much to the imagination, as it is where animals were skinned back in the day. You can just picture the horrible scene, with blood and offal running down the street, combined with the remnants of the fish markets. This would all flow down the gutters of the street, creating an incredibly foul smell in that part of town."

As you make your way down The Traverse, you'll then be taken to Cupola House. Built in 1693, this historic private home was destroyed in a fire before it was rebuilt in 2012.

However, it has been plagued by a handful of ghostly apparitions over the years, including a ghostly Victorian woman dressed

in all white who was spotted by a member of staff. She reportedly stood there for a few minutes before vanishing. And a former landlady once claimed things in the cellar would move on their own.

Another spine-chilling place on the tour is The Nutshell pub, which lays claim to being one of the smallest pubs in the country. However, don't let its pint-sized square footage fool you, as this tiny watering hole is host to some ghostly visitors.

"The pub has a reputation for being haunted by a little boy in one of the rooms," explains John.

Legend has it that the young child passed away under suspicious circumstances - with many speculating he drowned in the bath. And it is reported that if you look hard enough, you'll catch a glimpse of him before he quickly disappears.

Pub patrons have also reported poltergeist activities within, including smashed glasses and







drained batteries. Be sure to also catch a glimpse of the mummified cat that hangs within - but beware. Don't touch it, as it may bring about bad luck.

According to local legend, a landlady who tried to clean the mummified moggy shortly lost her job after touching it, and a group of servicemen from nearby RAF Honington who stole the cat fell foul to a series of accidents and fires until they made the wise decision to return it.

And John's favourite haunted

hotspot in his hometown? "Without a doubt, that would have to be the Great Churchyard - especially on an autumnal night. This is where we finish our tour, and it has that spooky atmosphere where darkness is accompanied by leaves swirling in the wind, the creaking of trees, footsteps and other sounds that add emphasis to our stories. It's one of the eeriest places in town."

The Great Churchyard is reportedly home to one of the town's most infamous undead

**RIGHT:**  
Moyses Hall museum

**LEFT:**  
Medieval Skinner  
Street

Pictures: ARCHANT



residents, The Grey Lady, who is said to appear in the churchyard at 11pm on February 24 every year.

She is believed to have been a nun who was linked to the death of the Duke of Gloucester, who is thought to have been murdered in 1447 at St Saviours Hospital.

Since her demise, locals claim they have spotted her at the Abbey Ruins, the St Saviours Hospital ruins, the Priory Hotel, the Theatre Royal, within various shops on Abbeygate Street, in buildings on Angel Hill, and in the cellars of Cupola House.

"One night, we were stood outside of the Cathedral, which was steeped in darkness, when suddenly the organ began playing aloud. The entire group froze, because they couldn't see where the music was coming from!"

Could that have been The Grey Lady making her presence known? One can only imagine...

**To find out more about the haunted side of Bury St Edmunds and all tours, visit [burystedmundstourguides.org](http://burystedmundstourguides.org). Tours are not suitable for children under 14.**