

## The uses and abuses of power

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:05 am

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In amongst everything that is going on, I have to take moments to remind myself that the world is not entirely mad right now and that for many of us, life will carry on despite everything that those who hold power would wish.

I do, of course, know that those people can cause enormous suffering. This appears to be particularly true of Labour politicians at present. As for Trump, his motivations are too psychopathic to consider.

However, there has been turmoil before, and there will be again, and through it all, most people have lived and left their mark in some way. I reminded myself of that on a walk from the centre of Ely to my home this morning. The pictures were taken on an iPhone and have not been edited.

Ely Cathedral has witnessed a great deal of comings and goings since the building of this most recent iteration commenced around 1080. A previous version dated from around 700.



A symbol of Norman power in its day, and so a significant indicator of the power to oppress, it now scrapes by on the fees that tourists pay to view the genuine wonder of its architecture. That should not, however, confuse us as to its original purpose, which was less to provide a place of worship and rather more to symbolise the new Norman power in the land. A nearby castle once reinforced that, but it has long gone.

This image, also taken this morning, looks across Cathedral Green.



The building on the left was once the Bishops' Palace, and the Bishop of Ely was a mighty influential person in their day. Their See once covered much of East Anglia, and extended well into what we now consider to be the Midlands. The building is now part of the private King's school, which is still closely associated with the cathedral, and is in its own way another symbol of power and division within our society as a result.

Ordinary people survived all this. The houses of those with greater means still survive. This one is located on one side of the parish Church of Saint Mary's, which is on the far side of Cathedral Green.



On the other side of the parish church is another house, this time with a notable past resident. Oliver Cromwell and his family lived here when he was MP for Huntingdon.



The facade in view was put in place around 125 years or so ago. The building itself would almost certainly have been familiar to Cromwell.

His house is not, however, the only symbol of power on the walk from the city centre to my home. This tithe barn (or was it a chapel, or even a hospital building - [no one seems quite sure](#)) dates from around the 14th century or slightly earlier, and was linked to the hospital of St Mary Magdelene and Saint John, the two surviving buildings from which date from the same period and are now subject to restoration by Historic England.



It would be great if they were opened to the public thereafter, because this hospital offers a different view of society at that time, when such institutions did provide care. There were around a dozen beds in this hospital.

History is littered with reminders of the use and abuse of power. Our job is to adapt to survive the consequences of both as best we are able.