

**Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers  
& Local History Study Group**  
NEWSLETTER No. 10 September 2022



**Heritage Open Day – Saturday, Sept 17th**

On September 17th the National Centre for Writing are holding an Open Day with a variety of their activities on show. Although it is not in the HOD booklet it is advertised on line. We will have a ‘stand’ in the Weston Hall (South Hall) including a display of photographs and booklets. Volunteers will be on hand to answer questions about the building and, if possible, to do mini tours. We will also have the Toppes re-enactment film running on the large TV.

If you would like to join us that day we would love to see you if only for a chat and catch up. If you are able to help on our stand please contact Heather ([heather@dragonhallnorwich.org.uk](mailto:heather@dragonhallnorwich.org.uk)). We will be hoping to attract new members to our Study Group and to our Volunteer team. (We have two new guides, living in King Street, since the pandemic and are hopeful of recruiting more). Details of the day are given on the Heritage Open Day website: <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/https-nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk-whats-on-heritage-open-day-22>

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**Dragon Hall Archive Project – a report from our Intern, Sally**

Our aim is to create a digital catalogue of all the documents, photos etc held at the Norfolk Record Office, in our cupboard at Dragon Hall and on Richard Matthew’s computer. Eventually the whole catalogue will be available on line. The first job was to decide on the ‘architecture’ of the catalogue, i.e. the main sections or subject headings. It is now my task to catalogue the collection, recording information about each section in an Excel spreadsheet.

We have faced some technological challenges with the digital collection; for example we began by using OneDrive ‘cloud storage’. However we quickly found that we ran out of storage, and were getting repeatedly locked out of the account! So we have returned to using a laptop and several hard drives to store the collection – showing that you don’t always have to use the most up-to-date technological methods to get the work done.

I think that my favourite task so far has been to digitise photo slides from the 1980s and 1990s which we found in the cupboard, many of them showing the restoration work on the building. This will make the images far more accessible to people. I had never used a slide scanner before, but it was really interesting to be able to see the images properly.

As well as this, I enjoyed photographing nine lever arch files of press cuttings from the past 20 years, using a camera at the Record Office. I got to learn about the exciting cultural events that have been hosted at Dragon Hall over the years – although most of my time was spent removing the cuttings from (and then placing them back within) plastic wallets!

I am going to be starting my Masters degree in Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies in September, and, although I am slightly nervous about this, I feel that this internship has been a great way to prepare myself. Even though I am still relatively new to the world of heritage work, I have felt very welcomed by all the people that I have met through this project, and I am already sad to be finishing in October. There is still plenty of work to do in the meantime however!

Sally Piper

*P.S. It's not too late to send in any odd photos, memories or documents etc to add to the archive – we are looking for informal or personal items not scholarly articles!*

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## Study Group News

### Outing to Waterloo Park

On Monday June 27th, eight of the Dragon Hall Study Group visited Waterloo Park for a tour led by Andrew, who is Chairman of its Friends Group. He gave us a very thorough guided tour so we could appreciate what a remarkable asset exists so close to the city centre. It was a lovely summer morning and it was so good to see the park, the second largest in Norwich, and its facilities being well used by all ages. There was plenty of room for mobility vehicles as well as buggies and children's bikes and scooters.



The designer of the Park was Captain Arnold Sandys - Winch, who was Superintendent of Parks for Norwich and had trained under the famous landscape architect, Thomas Mawson. Work began in 1931 and it was officially opened two years later and cost £37,000; the overall layout is largely as it was in the 30s. The park contains a variety of mature trees, many of which were planted when the park was established; the oaks and hornbeams were particularly fine specimens, as were the yew hedges. We finished our tour at the Pavilion, built in classical style, which is now operated by 'The Feed', a not for profit

organisation, who run a very successful cafe here.

We all expressed our appreciation to Andrew for organising this 'outing' and for being such an informative and interesting guide. Waterloo Park will be getting more visitors!

Thank you Andrew!

Much more interesting information (mostly from Andrew) can be found here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo\\_Park,\\_Norwich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_Park,_Norwich) and a 1931 photo by George Plunkett here:

[http://www.georgeplunkett.co.uk/Norwich/Parks%20and%20Gardens/Waterloo%20Park%20Avenue%20Approach%20Angel%20Rd%20\[B552\]%201933-04-30.jpg](http://www.georgeplunkett.co.uk/Norwich/Parks%20and%20Gardens/Waterloo%20Park%20Avenue%20Approach%20Angel%20Rd%20[B552]%201933-04-30.jpg)

### Meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup>

We had talks about two important figures from Norwich's past:

**Sir Thomas Browne (1605- 1682)** presented by Linda Bradfield.

We learned a great deal about this eminent physician, philosopher and writer who was not Norwich born but lived and practised here for the last 45 years of his life. Although Browne had been educated at Winchester and Cambridge he went abroad for his medical training and studied in some of the best European universities, developing also his linguistic skills - he had knowledge of 6 languages! His first published work and his most well known is 'Religio Medici' which attempts to reconcile his 17th century conventional Christianity with the developing understanding of physical science and natural philosophy. His most popular work, 'Pseudodoxia Epidemica' debunked many popular myths of the time. However, like most of his contemporaries, he believed in the power of witchcraft and his evidence at their trial may well have contributed to the condemnation of two poor women.

Browne was an influential English stylist and was responsible for introducing hundreds of words into the English language including electricity, hallucination and suicide. He seems to have led a life untroubled by the political upheavals of the time and was knighted by Charles 11 in 1671.

[To get an idea of Browne's style, see below for extracts from *Urne Burial*]

### **Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich, 1343 - 1406** by Mary Bradford

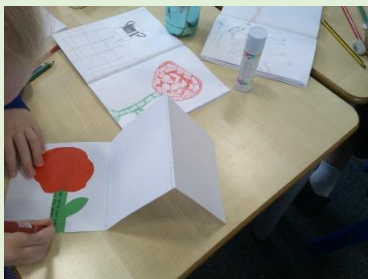
Despenser has been described as '*probably the most colourful and controversial character to occupy the see.*' Born in 1343 as the youngest son of a middle ranking baronial family, he was destined for the church, received a suitable education at Oxford, took minor orders and acquired some valuable church livings. However he received a military training as well and fought in Italy as a mercenary. He attracted the attention of the Roman pope (there was a rival one in Avignon) and in 1370 was appointed to the vacant see of Norwich. He was not yet an ordained priest and was still three years under the qualifying age of 30. In 1381 he played a leading part in the suppression of the Peasants' Revolt in East Anglia and in particular in Norfolk where the untrained, poorly armed peasants were finally crushed by his army at the so-called Battle of North Walsham. His decisive actions were much appreciated by the ruling classes.

Two years later, in 1383, came Despenser's second major involvement in national affairs - the so-called Norwich Crusade. This involved his organising and leading an expedition to Flanders to fight against the French and also look after English commercial interests. He appears to have been a competent administrator and was described as '*a conscientious and caring pastor,*' but also by an admittedly hostile writer as '*a man distinguished neither in learning nor discretion ...unbridled and insolent ...like another Herod incapable of restraint.*' However he was involved in the commissioning of the beautiful Despenser Retable which has survived for us to admire in his cathedral!

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### **Stories from the Quarter – project update by Hannah Garrard**

The National Centre for Writing received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop the collection of oral histories relating to the area. *Stories from the quarter* is a heritage exchange project collecting interviews from the Bengali community who live and work in Norwich's medieval quarter, providing opportunities for the Bengali community and Norfolk school children to connect with Dragon Hall and King St's rich history as a place of commerce and living space. The King St Community Voices oral history project has been the inspiration behind the new collection, which will be housed in the Norfolk Record Office.



*Making a concertina book*



*Timber rubbing*



*Inspecting the garden*

The NCW team had a brilliant time with year 4s classes at Dragon Hall over the summer, exploring Dragon Hall's nooks and crannies and listening to the oral histories, including Linda Jones' recollection of the old bakery and Richard Cody's stories of playing with his pals on King St. The owner of Magdalen St's Spice Valley restaurant, Wali Ullah, is the newest addition to the oral history collection and children listened to him talking about his life in Dakka, Bangladesh, and why he chose Norwich as a place to raise his family and start his business.

Each school participated in a 3 x workshop series both here at Dragon Hall and in the classroom. Pupils created a whole range of pieces from concertina books to spoken word poems on the theme of heritage.

The project facilitators were Avani Shah and Amanda Addison who created a very special set of workshops for all classes. Participating schools were: Mulbarton Primary; Hemblington Primary; Colman Junior; Sprowston Junior; Magdalen Gates Primary.

The next phase of the project will include creating and recording spoken word stories from the collection of 10 Bengali oral histories and hosting a project community open day in 2023. Many thanks to the NLHF and all lottery players for making this project possible, and to Dragon Hall Volunteers for the support with training and tours.

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### **Dragon Hall Archive Project: Call for digital copies of Toppes Times for the archive**

Please could you look deep into your computer to see if you have copies of ‘Toppes Times’ as follows: 2006 Winter; 2007 Winter; 2008 Autumn; 2009 Summer & Autumn; 2010 any, except Xmas; 2011 Spring & Summer; 2012 Spring; 2014 any, except March – or if it’s easier just send me what you’ve got.

Please send any of the above to [richardmatthew24@gmail.com](mailto:richardmatthew24@gmail.com) – many thanks.

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### **Those were the Days .....**

One bonus of being involved in the Archive Project has been turning up interesting documents from the fairly recent past, for example this extract from ‘Guides Newsletter 2000’ written in lively style by Joan Uff:

“What a day we had for the **King Street Festival** [*remember that?*] !! Rain, rain and more rain, but in spite of that a great time was had by visitors – we had **540** of them and they spent £900 with us! The reception room [*where??*] became a place to duck out of the rain (pardon the pun). Our thanks to all who made the day go well!! I realise that costumes should have been evident to make even more of an impact and advertisement – must make sure at the next Festival?!”



*King Street Festival 2003: Outside Dragon Hall*



*Norwich Samba Band*

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### **More King Street memories: A Walk Down King Street in 1875**

This is another document found in our cupboard in the north cellar. It paints a vivid picture of a bustling street, with many trades and industries. It comes from the Eastern Evening News of December 1925 and comprises the memories of ‘an elderly gentleman in 1925, reminiscing about King Street 50 years or so earlier’. He starts at the southern end of the street and works his way up the east side to the ‘Boleyn building’ next to Dragon Hall:

*Then came the baker's shop of Mr. Witch, [possibly the forerunner of Mr Heydon, father of Linda Jones, our late colleague] which was quite a local institution, and next was the "Old Barge Yard" with a public river frontage. Ben Gibson of the **Old Barge Inn** also sold beach sand, which was so liberally scattered on the floors in pubs and shops.*

Before going down St. Ann's Staithe Lane, one might call at Morgan's Cellar House - beer halfpenny a pint at that time of day. It was kept by John Cooper, a member of the "Eighteen Stone Club", which was held here, and none was eligible under that weight. Amongst the members were Ted Reynolds, of the oil mills; John England; John Spencer; Lincoln, the watchmaker; Jim Nelson, the sawyer; John Moughtin, coal merchant; Tom Smithdale of St. Ann's Foundry; William Gooch from the Brewery; and several others who lived and did business in this locality.

Going down **St. Ann's Staithe Lane** on the right hand were the oil and cake mills of jovial Mr. Ted Reynolds where a large number of men were employed. The seed came by spitsail barge from Ipswich and London, the cake going away by wherries to any part of the county they could sail to, also by road and rail, and the oil was sold to merchants. At the top and next to **Synagogue Street** were the premises of Mr. Watts (successor to Mr. Lincoln), clay pipe, match and firewood manufacturer, where the long "churchwarden" and numerous other kinds of pipes were made, also the old sulphur and phosphorus matches to light them with — but you must not be in a hurry with them.

Between this factory and the river were the noted **St. Ann's Iron Works of Thomas Smithdale** ("Old Tom" as he was mostly called), where he had an extensive business of engineering millwright, boiler making, and iron and brass founder. [The works were roughly on the site of the new apartment block behind Dragon Hall]. Iron castings of several tons were made here, and also the largest steam engine ever made in Norwich, with cylinders 5 ft. diameter and 6 ft. stroke, for a famous city firm. About this time "Young Tom", his eldest son, made his first Silver Prize Medal turbine pump, for marsh drainage, having previously designed and made the first steam capstan engine used by the Yarmouth and Lowestoft herring fishing boats. And what a man he was for a fast steam launch. Fancy, 2 hrs. 20 mins. from his works to Yarmouth pier head with his "Pandora" (twin-screw), and then with the "Pyrrha. This he sold to Cambridge University for training purposes. The works usually employed about 70 men.

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### **Toppesology: Where did Robert Toppes come from?**



Toppes' origins have always been somewhat of a mystery, not least the question of where he derived the funds to build Dragon Hall at the age of 30 approx. when no family records have been found. This has led to speculation that he came from the Low Countries. This photo was taken by Jim Marriage c.2010 in Roskilde, on the island of Zealand in Denmark. It supports a different theory: that the Topp(e)s family were long- settled in Norfolk before the birth of Robert c.1400 – possibly part of the original Danish settlements in the area. This could also be in line with the known occurrence of 'Toppes' in Friesland (Northern Holland) and Northern Germany from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century. 'Minde' is believed to mean 'memory'.

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**Extracts from Urne-Burial by Sir Thomas Browne:**  
*"Many have taken voluminous pains to determine the state of the soul upon disunion; but men have been most phantastical in the singular contrivances of their corporall dissolution .....* "  
*"In a field of old Walsingham, not many moneths past, were digged up between fourty and fifty Urnes, deposited in a dry and sandy soile, not a yard deep, nor farre from one another*