

Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers & Local History Study Group

NEWSLETTER No. 11 December 2022



Heritage Open Days – a big success

Our main Heritage Open Day event on **17 September** was a joint venture with the National Centre for Writing and attracted about 150 people. The entrance was through the garden with coffee and nibbles available in the glass gallery. The DHHV display was in the Great Hall with the focus on a large display of our photos, maps, plans and books for sale. The Toppes video was played several times during the day and visitors had a chance to see the Dragon Hall models from our former display. Over the day eight volunteers were available to answer questions and do mini tours of the building. Amongst the visitors were children who wanted to explore the Undercroft and even some UEA freshers with parents. £83 from the sale of books and pamphlets was raised for our fund for supporting the maintenance of the historic fabric of the building. Four people signed up to become volunteers and/or join the Study Group and we are thrilled about that. On 14 March, thanks to funding from National Centre for Writing, we will have our first '**Training Day**' for new volunteers. After the Covid gap we have received a real boost to our campaign to share our enthusiasm for Dragon Hall and its guardian the National Centre for Writing.. A big thank you to all the volunteers who were involved.

On September 13th Richard Matthew also gave a talk on the history of Dragon Hall as one of the HOD talks at The Forum. This was well attended and several people signed up as being interested in the Study Group or in becoming volunteers.

New Members & Archive Volunteers

We don't have a formal membership scheme, let alone a subscription, but we were very glad to **welcome** Valerie Kennedy, Dee Roye, Miriam Overington and Brian Courtney to our Study Group on November 21st.

We also give a warm welcome to our new **Archive Volunteers** (see below): Milly Dyer, Francesco Romano, Alexa Adetimehin, Kelly Loban, Holly Brownley, Emma Rowles, Callum Wyn.

Study Group News

Meeting on October 17th

Susan Keys has been engaged in research on the recently released 1921 Census returns for our area. She gave us her careful transcription of the entries for 111-123 King St., (aka Dragon Hall); St. Ann's Lane; and Old Barge Yard and guided our discussion.

William Edward	COMER	Head	M	1870	51	Old Catton, <u>Nfk</u>	Goods Carman Out of Work. Labourer on Distress Work. (GE <u>Rlwy</u> , Thorpe Station) Home Duties
Eliza		Wife	F	1874	47	Norwich	
William Edward		Son	M	1899	21	Norwich	Carpenter (Boulton & Paul, Norwich)
Gertrude Eliz.		Daughter	F	1904	17	Norwich	Telegraph Messenger (General Post Office)
Arthur Albert		Son	M	1907	14	Norwich	Errand Boy (Mr <u>Fredman</u> , Confectioner, Prin of Wales Road, Norwich)
Florrie Mabel		Daughter	F	1909	12	Norwich	-
Fred		Son	M	1912	8	Norwich	-
Eliza		Daughter	F	1915	6	Norwich	-
Reginald Alfred	CREED	Son-in-law	M	1894	27	East <u>Dereham, Nfk</u>	Motor Lorry Driver (Messrs Child & Pullen Hauliers, 1a Portman Road, Ipswich)
Lilian Maud	CREED	Daughter	F	1896	25	Norwich	Home Duties
Reginald Vernon	CREED	Grandson	M	1920	-	Norwich	-

Image above: *Census 1921: Residents of 121 King St (part of The Old Barge Room), showing Susan's great grandfather, William Comer and family*

There was so much of interest in it. We commented on how many people were crammed into some of the small tenements: 121 King St., (aka The Old Barge Room), housed 11 of Susan's relatives! It was also quite remarkable how many of the residents were Norwich born. As you would expect most of those employed worked nearby, e.g. at Boulton & Paul, Colman's, local small businesses and for the railway. Despite the number of breweries in King St., only one employee was recorded. This 1921 transcript now brings our study of the Census from 1841 to 1911 (to be seen on our website) up to date and will be added to our website. Thank you Susan for all your hard work and expertise in producing this valuable resource for us. It reminds us that Dragon Hall was a home for many families for nearly five hundred years – far longer than its short life as a trading hall.

Meeting on November 21st

Mary Bradford gave a short talk on Carrow Priory, heavily based on the chapter on 'The Religious Houses' by Carole Rawcliffe & Christopher Harper-Bill in *Medieval Norwich* (ed. Rawcliffe & Wilson). She also used *Norfolk Archaeology, Vol. XXIX, pages 41 - 88 :Three Carrow Account Rolls* by Lilian Redstone. These account rolls for 1456, 1485 and 1528 are a remarkable survival and shed much light on the life of a medieval nunnery at the end of the Middle Ages. An online edition of Walter Rye's 'CarrowPriory' gave the names of boarders at the Priory.

The Priory was founded by King Stephen in 1146 as a **convent/ priory for Benedictine nuns** just outside the city boundary and was wealthy and prestigious, attracting many bequests and donations from the city and the county. At its height in the late C14 there were 27 nuns - this was reduced to 8 by the time of its dissolution. At this time it was still judged to be of good repute. As well as being a spiritual centre it played an important economic part in the life of the city particularly in Conesford & Bracondale, and the city's south eastern suburbs, providing employment and indeed accommodation for a large number of people. Girls from prosperous families were educated there and wealthy citizens, county people and especially widows could rent properties on the extensive site. **Thomas Wetherby** and later his widow, Margaret, whose daughter was a nun at the convent, had property there. By the end of the Medieval period much of its income came from sheep rearing on its estates, reflecting developments in Norfolk as a whole.

The nuns normally had very good relations with the citizens of Norwich and city officials but they had a long lasting dispute with **their fellow Benedictines**, the Cathedral monks. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, a widow from Lakenham (both the nuns and the monks had property and interests there) accused the prioress and one of her nuns of 'inciting, and abetting' the murder of her husband (with a mole spade among other farming tools!) and then harbouring the malefactors. The woman was supported by the Cathedral monks and the nuns by the City, keen to take any chance to get at their old enemy, the Cathedral community. Despite the temporary imprisonment of the two nuns, Carrow Priory won the case. An interesting footnote is that Walter Rye records **Alice & Amy Toppes** as boarders at Carrow in 1438/9 - these are likely to be daughters of Robert Toppes' first marriage- and an **Alice Toppes** and her sister were boarding in 1470/71 - these would be the offspring of his second marriage to Joan Knyvett. In the legal disputes concerning the administration of **Robert Toppes' will**, his son Godfrey mentions that on the day his mother's house was ransacked – which we have dubbed '**The Carts of Stuffs Affair**' - he was visiting his sister at Carrow.

Christmas Event and next Study Group meeting

On **Monday December 12th** we are meeting for a light lunch + drinks in the **Coach and Horses** in Bethel Street **at 12.00**. We have met there in previous years and they do a good tapas menu

plus many other choices. If you haven't already confirmed with Mary that you intend to come and/or have not given your menu choice to her please do so before December 3rd (john.bradford@btinternet.com). She can send you the menu if necessary. Please bring the necessary amount of cash to pay for your food and drink.

There will be **no Study Group meeting on December 19th** but there will be a **tour** at 2.0 p.m. as normal. The next meeting of the Study Group will be on **Monday January 16th** at 10.30 when local author, Steve Silk, will be talking about the **Wensum**. He will also have copies of his book(s) for sale – cash or cheque please.



The Despenser Retable

In August Mary gave us a talk about the 'Fighting Bishop' Despenser. Below is the Despenser Retable in St Luke's Chapel in the Cathedral. It dates back to c.1382 and is one of the finest surviving examples of late fourteenth century church art anywhere in Europe. It is thought to have been commissioned, possibly from a local artist, by Bishop Henry le Despenser, as a thank-offering following his involvement in the suppression of the Peasants' Revolt in Norfolk in 1381.

The image above is from the website [Welcome to Norwich 360](https://norwich360.com/centralnorwich1.html?fbclid=IwAR1FFAIEt9VOfPptiPbK30I56QOUxcHbdgwitlhMeVKqZfjzy_mdr7Bx5pg):

https://norwich360.com/centralnorwich1.html?fbclid=IwAR1FFAIEt9VOfPptiPbK30I56QOUxcHbdgwitlhMeVKqZfjzy_mdr7Bx5pg

Here you can see stunningly clear images of some 30 Norwich buildings and locations, where you can rotate the viewpoint, including Dragon Hall – easily the best way to see the glories of the roof structure in close up – (and make yourself dizzy).

Finance & Tours

We have agreed to give a further **donation of £600** from our income from tours etc to the National Centre for Writing towards maintenance of the medieval parts of the complex, leaving us with approx. £1000. At our meeting on November 21st we discussed how we could boost our income and agreed to ask NCW if they could publicise our **External Talks** on their website and also whether it would be possible to have a **card reader** on tour days as many people don't have 'ready money' [*spot the quotation!*] these days.

The numbers for **tours** have picked up – we had 21 on November 21st – and we are considering whether we could increase the number of tours to two per month, especially as we have recently increased our team of **Tour Guides**.

Dragon Hall Archive Project: Update

Our Intern, Sally Piper, has made great strides and has almost completed the initial structure of the Catalogue for our two Collections, the Digital Collection and the NRO Collection. We have been learning 'Archive-Speak', e.g. 'Series' (= topic), 'File' (= folder), 'Item' (= file) and how to use the Excel spreadsheet for the Catalogue – extract below:

Reference number	Level	Title & accession number	Creator(s)	Description
DH/NRO	Collection	DRAGON HALL NORFOLK RECORD OFFICE COLLECTION	Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers	Documents relating to Dragon Hall which are held at the Norfolk Record Office. In order to request these documents, you will need the accession number and the box number.
DH/NRO/01	Series	COMMUNICATIONS & EDUCATION	Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers	Documents and images that were created for the purpose of education or outreach for Dragon Hall.
DH/NRO/01/01	File	CREATIVE WORKS	Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers	Drawings and paintings of Dragon Hall.
DH/NRO/01/01/01	Item	ACC2014/292 19/20 Drawing of Dragon Hall Dragon by Len Riches	Len Riches	1 envelope containing "The Dragon of Dragon Hall" drawing by Len Riches, as well as a black and white photocopy and a tracing.
DH/NRO/01/01/02	Item	ACC2014/292 01/20 Collected materials from Ruth Murray for Appeal Fund 1991	Ruth Murray, Norwich City Council Architects Office, Nigel Orme	1 plastic sleeve containing assorted maps (noted as not being created by Ruth Murray, but possibly by the Norwich City Council Architects Office) and documents. 1 note about the design of the Dragon Hall logo and booklets. Information documents about newsletters and designs for projects.
DH/NRO/01/01/03	Item	ACC2014/292 01/20 Watercolour painting of Old Barge Yard c. 20th century	Unknown	1 A4 watercolour painting on a board showing Old Barge Yard.
DH/NRO/01/01/04	Item	ACC2014/292 02/20 Paintings and assorted documents by Ann Yurasovsky 2008	Ann Yurasovsky	2 CDs labelled Dragon Hall Ann Yurasovsky 2008. Details and copies of Ann Yurasovsky's painting. Includes form signed by Ann Yurasovsky giving copyright to the Norfolk & Norwich Heritage Trust.

Extract from the NRO Collection catalogue, showing the four levels in different colours: Collection, Series, File and Item

The 'NRO Collection' already has 217 rows of entries in the Catalogue, many of them for a whole folder of documents or photos; many of these will be for the Archive Volunteers (see below) to break down into sub-folders or individual items. The 'Digital Collection' has 742 rows! – most of them being 'Items', e.g. a single press cutting, photo or document.

Sally's contract with UEA – on our behalf – finishes on December 9th but we are very pleased that she has agreed to stay on for another three months, paid by us directly but for only 10 hours per month. The funding for the NRO Community Archive Project which provided professional advice to us all has now finished so we are now 'on our own' – a slightly daunting prospect.

At Sally's suggestion we have recruited some six or seven student **Archive Volunteers** to flesh out the Catalogue by looking deeper into the boxes in the NRO and the digital folders and inserting more detail for selected files and sub-files. Sally's role will now be to co-ordinate their efforts and to advise and monitor them. They will be working partly in the NRO and partly on line from home. A **WhatsApp group** will be set up for the exchange of info, tips and queries, supplemented by occasional live and Zoom meetings. This is quite (another) new departure for all of us and we feel that we are blazing a trail in the world of community archives.

Once the Catalogue is complete the plan is to host it on a **dedicated website** so that it will be available to all. We are hoping that one or more of our Archive Volunteers will undertake that work but if you, family members or friends have any expertise in **building websites** or advice on where to start we would be glad to hear from you. Contact richard@dragonhallnorwich.org.uk.

Delving into the Archives:

1995 - Those were the Days!

“No longer does the wind whistle through or the rain come in “

Dragon Hall

news

Spring 1995

FROM PLYWOOD TO PLASTER

In the last three months the Great Hall has undergone a process of rapid transformation. No longer are visitors and guides assailed by icy drafts! No longer does the wind whistle through or the rain come in! Now the outside world is only to be viewed through the windows - and not through the walls. The front wall is restored.

Meteorology apart, the greatest benefit of restoration is the structural and visual cohesion it has brought to the first floor front wall - both inside and out.

The work has been carried out by R Hogg & Son, historic building specialists from Coney Weston in Suffolk. This small team of builders has achieved a mammoth task especially as they have had to work mainly outside during the most inclement months of the year.

One of the most skilled tasks was replacing rotten areas of the bressumer beam supporting the wall. In order to preserve as much of the original as possible, the beam was treated in sections, fitting new oak jigsaw-wise into the existing beam. This often involved paring minute pieces off the new wood time and again until it exactly fitted.

The panels between the oak studs have been filled with expanded metal lath, rendered and limewashed. Inside the hall, the white limewash has created a marvelous sensation of light. Outside, ivory limewash has vastly improved the appearance of the building.

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Immediately following repairs to the front wall, the restoration of the back wall is now underway. This will not only further enhance the magnificent space of the Great Hall, but also re-instate a major component of Toppes' original fenestration in the form of a large mullion window at the top of the main stair.

While the original window no longer exists, the form is known from surviving evidence. Our task is to sensitively restore the dramatic sense of light in the existing opening, but to make it apparent to present and future generations that this is a twentieth century window. To this end, the mullions and transoms will be in the original position which is clearly visible, but the detail of the mouldings will remain simple, in keeping with our 'house style', as seen elsewhere at Dragon Hall, in particular on the main oak stair.



A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS to ALL OUR READERS!

A WARNING: NO Mummers or False Beards! – ONLY MAKE MERRY IN YOUR OWN HOME!

“Undesirable Christmas Customs

The mayor and aldermen order, on behalf of the king and his city, that no-one whatsoever, regardless of status or position, during this holy season of Christmas be so bold as to walk about at night engaging in any fashion in mummers, plays, interludes, or any other form of dressing up in false beards, painted masks, or with faces made up or altered in any way; upon penalty of imprisonment and payment of a fine determined at the discretion of the mayor and aldermen. Except that it is lawful for every person to make merry in a respectable manner inside his own home. Furthermore, they order, on behalf of the king and his city, that each respectable person who resides in any street or lane of this city should hang from his house each night during this solemn festival a lantern containing a candle, burning for as long as it lasts, upon penalty for each default of 4d. paid to the Chamber”.

from London Records 1418 - 19

MEMORIES of YE OLDE MEDIEVALE MARKETES

(What a handsome bunch!)

