

Tours, Tall Tales, Tapas, Shakespeare and Toppes

Our traditional annual Christmas beano was held on December 11th, commencing with one of Shea Fiddes's legendary walking tours. Those who survived gathered at the Coach and Horses for tapas. This was a very enjoyable occasion and thanks are due to Valerie for her efficient 'menu management and payment' operation. (She clearly has a future in hospitality - or debt collection ...?).



I left with the phrase 'good company, good wine' in my head - whence I knew not. Later I discovered it was part of a quotation from Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* (a play I have never read):

'Good company, good wine, good welcome, can make good people.' (Act I, Scene 4). I discovered that, by pure coincidence, this scene features **Sir Thomas Lovell** who, as you will know, was the grandson of no less than our own **Robert Toppes**. Lovell's mother was Anne Toppes, daughter of Robert. He was the fifth son of Sir Thomas Lovell of Barton Bendish, and was Speaker of the House of Commons, Secretary to the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer; he died in 1524.

'Stepping into Dragon Hall'

NCW have been awarded a grant of £103,486 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to support **'The Next Chapter: Stepping Into Dragon Hall'** which aims to *'re-imagine how people can explore and connect to Dragon Hall'*. There will be new free visiting hours, creative activities and volunteering opportunities. Three new part time posts have been created for this project:

Heritage Engagement Coordinator – Clare Spender: three days per week.

Programme Engagement Officer – Lizzie Figura-Drane: 2.5 days per week.

Heritage Events Duty Manager – Charlotte Reeve: 2.5 days per week.

As part of the project the Wolfson, Coetzee and Smith Rooms (aka 'Butcher's Shop & Rectory Rooms') will be open for drop-in Sunday to Wednesday, 10.0 to 3.0 every week by August 2024, but operational by the end of February. Until then they will be open just on Sunday and Monday. On Thursdays and Fridays the spaces will be bookable for NCW events.

The main aspects of the project are:

- New interpretation materials for visitors to Dragon Hall, exploring stories from Dragon Hall's heritage alongside the stories of existing writers.
- New 'drop-in' visitor hours, for four days per week.
- Training of staff in oral history.
- Creation of a new community kitchen for cookery and storytelling activities.

- Recruitment of an expanded volunteer group to support public access, welcome services, events and tours.
- Expansion of creative writing and heritage learning and participation sessions, with a focus on reaching families, children and young people, refugees, asylum seekers and older residents.
- To partner with Norfolk Record Office and Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery to reinterpret the heritage of Dragon Hall.

Three of us have had a meeting with Peggy, Amanda and the project staff where we took them through our 'heritage assets', i.e. resources, and gave them a tour of the building. We look forward to working with them and supporting them in the creation of new stories about Dragon Hall.

Study Group News

Meeting on January 15th:

Clare Spender and Hannah Garrard gave us a very full and interesting briefing on the 'Stepping Into Dragon Hall' project – see above.

Richard is planning to issue an **updated pack of information** to all guides.

A combination of age, health and circumstances means that some of us will be considering (reluctantly) **handing on or reducing responsibilities**.

Rachel & Nikki have received Shea's **King St. Tours folder** and are now official custodians.

Nikki agreed to consider taking over from Richard, in the medium term, the management of **the digital records**.

Mary asked for a volunteer to take over or share her role as **Chair of the Study Group** or to act as Minute Secretary.

Next meeting: February 19th at 10.30

Rachel Hobson will talk about the **Burston School Strike** which lasted from 1914 to 1939 – the longest strike in English history – which led to the setting up of the 'Strike School'. Every year the strike is commemorated by hundreds of trade unionists.

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The Inside Story of Dragon Hall and its Owner and Builder, Robert Toppes

March 21st 10.0 to 4.0 at Dragon Hall

A unique opportunity to study Norwich's iconic architectural masterpiece in the Hall itself. The Full Day programme will include the history of the trading hall; its building, its effective loss after 1467 and its rediscovery and restoration in the 20th-century, and the life of Robert Toppes, its creator, in the context of mid-15th-century Norwich. There will also be two films and a guided tour of the Hall and its situation beside the River Wensum. The Tutors will be Richard Matthew (DH guide and author of a book about Robert Toppes) and Adrian O'dell (DH guide and Landscape Historian).

Details: <https://www.wea.org.uk/courses?search=dragon+hall>

Compulsory Viewing ..?

A free online lecture by Prof. Ronald Hutton: **'Dragons - A History'** from Gresham College on **Wednesday 14th Feb at 6.0 p.m.**

Book at: https://www.gresham.ac.uk/whats-on/dragons?mc_cid=5a004a2ab8&mc_eid=ebcd68b211



(Gresham College, of course, was founded by Sir Thomas Gresham, of the Norfolk mercer family, from Gresham, near Holt!)

Profile: Valerie Kennedy

Valerie is one of a number of more recent and very welcome Volunteers. She has had a very interesting career in foreign parts.

"Having grown up in Essex, I did both my degrees at the UEA, first Comparative Literature with Linguistics and French, including a year in France, then a Ph.D. on Dickens and Balzac, after which I worked at universities in Kenya (two years), Morocco (eighteen and a half years), and Turkey (twenty-four years).

In Kenya the students were bright with very good English, and the landscapes, flora and fauna stunning. In Morocco having fluent French from the start was a definite advantage and learning Moroccan Arabic challenging but fun: most Moroccans have a great sense of humour/irony. Morocco was a wonderful place to live, with a superb cuisine, fascinating medinas, very talented students, four ranges of mountains, plus Roman ruins.

Huge, extending from Greece to Syria, a crossroads of civilisations, Turkey offered new challenges, including the language, initially quite baffling because non-Indo-European. In 1997 the country was very different from the place it is today - more westward-looking, Islam much less visible.

Forty-six years on, I've retired to Norwich, where Richard Matthew's talk on Dragon Hall during Heritage Week of 2022 stimulated my interest in local history. Since my student days, I've been interested in historical issues, writing and editing books on the Palestinian author, Edward Said, an obvious choice for someone who has lived in a former British colony, a former French one, and a former imperial power; on Henrietta Liston, an early 19th century resident in Turkey; and a book of essays about European powers in Egypt. All rather distant from Norwich, but the city provides a rich historical environment, and I am happy to start to explore it".

Valerie has kindly agreed to be co-editor of the Newsletter with Richard.

Study Group Meeting: November

Richard Matthew spoke about **'Dad's Army: Conesford 1355'**. He explained that every freeman had to provide himself with arms, and under the Statute of Westminster of 1285 men had to be inspected in their hundred twice a year. The aim was akin to the Home Guard - which his father had served in - and to ensure that the men had all the required weapons to hand. In Norwich each of the four leets was deemed to be a 'hundred', North and South Conesford plus Ber Street being one leet.

We are lucky that the record of the 'View of Arms' of 1355 in Conesford has survived and lists all the men who were summoned on that day. They were organised into companies of 100 men

under a 'centenar', each company having 5 'platoons' of 20 men under a 'vintenar'. Conesford had a total of 180 men. The arms they had to provide were based on the value of their goods, not on land: some thirty men in all had defensive armour, the rest having swords, knives, daggers etc. One of the 'fully armed' men listed was **Roger Midday** who by 1352 had acquired the northern part of the Dragon Hall site which became the Woburn holding. Two women are listed as 'servant', probably meaning that they were widows who had inherited the obligation and sent a substitute. We don't know where the 'View' was carried out.

Logo Rewind – Trademarks of Medieval Norwich by Darren Leeder is the intriguing title of a new, beautifully produced book (price £45) about the Norwich merchants marks. The 'blurb' for the book says:



'During the 14th–16th centuries, Norwich was a centre of regional and continental trade with products defined by merchants marks. These marks were emblems stamped onto goods and carved into the facades, beams and windows of buildings across the city. Each logo had to be different from its competitor and distinguishable by a mostly illiterate population and, as such, are precursors of today's brand logos.'

*Norwich's medieval marks are in fact **an early example of commercial branding** overlooked by contemporary graphic design. This is a practice previously thought not to have begun in earnest until the late 19th century. They are almost entirely unknown by the public, specifically the national and the international design community'.*

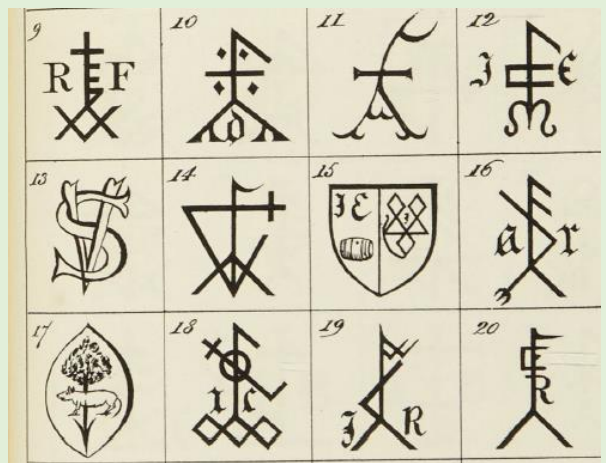
The book has a huge range of Norwich merchant marks, looking at them, interestingly, very much from a graphic designer's point of view, making us see them afresh as excellent examples of graphic design, akin to (and better than?) today's company logos; Leeder sees them as similar to the **pre-war Bauhaus aesthetic**. But Leeder also gives very useful potted biographies of all the merchants who can be identified- which is most of them – including yes, **Robert Toppes!** – his merchant's mark is **number 14** below.

(from *Norfolk Archaeology, Vol.3, Plate X*)

Leeder acknowledges his debt to W.C. Ewing who was probably the first to draw attention in print to the importance of merchants marks in *Notices of the Norwich Merchant Marks: Norfolk Archaeology Vol. 3, 1849*.

(You can read the original article on line - as for nearly all the articles in *Norfolk Archaeology* at: <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/details.xhtml?recordId=3236316>)

Ewing in turn acknowledges his debt to John Kirkpatrick, the 18th century antiquary, who copied many of the marks from around the city. Leeder also makes the point that the marks occur in many different locations: on memorials, documents, houses, signs and in stained glass, two good examples being in **the Guildhall Mayor's Court Room** and (yes, you've guessed) in the original, but no longer surviving, **Toppes Window** in St Peter Mancroft church.

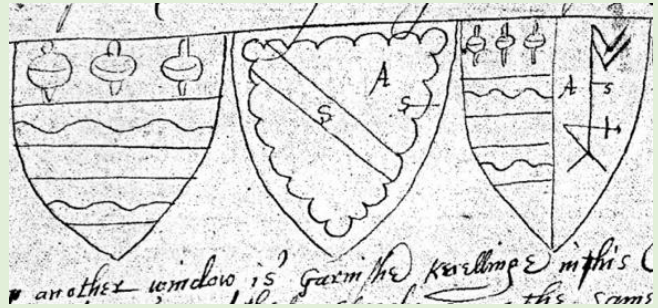




Arms of the Grocers Company, showing cloves, and (unknown) merchant's mark in the east window of the **Mayor's Court Room**. Mercers, such as Toppes, were the majority of the mayors and aldermen in the 15th century, followed by drapers and grocers.

The bottom row of panels from the Toppes Window in St Peter Mancroft, sketched in 1754.

At the left hand end: Toppes' coat of arms. On the right hand end: Toppes' coat of arms plus merchant's mark.



(from David King: *The Stained Glass of St Peter Mancroft*)

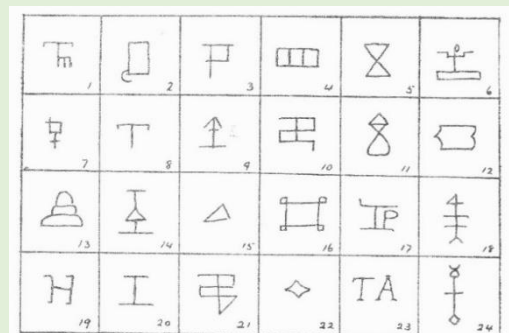


In his window of thirty stained glass panels Toppes thus neatly combined 'advertisements' for his spirituality, his social status and his trade. But his colleague and contemporary, **Ralph Segrym**, went one better: he commissioned a painted panel for the rood screen in St John Maddermarket church showing St. Leonard with Segrym's merchant's mark immediately above his halo - see left.

(from the rood screen of St John Maddermarket church: V & A website)

Norwich weavers also had 'logos' which were used to identify their cloth, but as can be seen from these examples from the Mayor's Court records, their designs were not nearly as accomplished as the earlier merchant marks.

(from *Minutes of the Mayor's Court 1630 - 1631*, NRS Vol.XV)



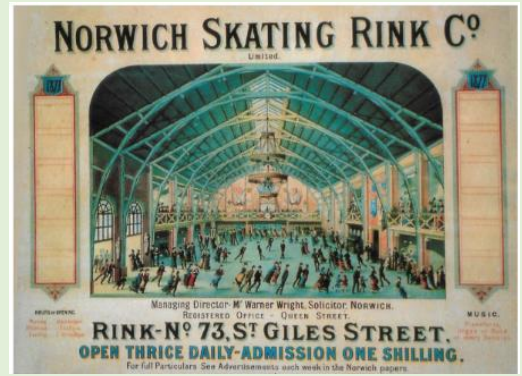
Textile Pattern Books in the Eighteenth Century by Dr Michael Nix

This is the first comprehensive account of Norwich's textile industry in the second half of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth, published in 2023 in association with the Costume and Textile Association. It covers the sourcing of wool, the production in East Anglia and in Ireland of worsted yarn, the processes involved in turning this yarn into highly desirable and beautiful stuffs in Norfolk and Norwich, and the trading and marketing of these fabrics in Europe, the Americas, China and elsewhere.

Click below to turn the pages of an original pattern book.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=200143767783275>

And finally ... a reminder of **another unique Norwich building** and art and artefact collection which I had almost forgotten about. It was known as 'Country and Eastern' but is now the **South Asia Collection** and primarily a wonderful exhibition space with a full-time curator and fascinating exhibits.

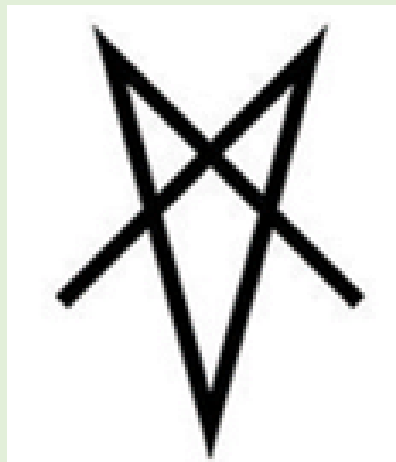


It is also of course the ex- Norwich (Roller) Skating Rink – later a vaudeville theatre - built in 1876 and lovingly restored by Philip and Jeanie Milward who have created the Collection. Its wooden structure has echoes of Dragon Hall. If you haven't done so recently, do take a look – it's free!

P.S. Somehow this rather nice sketch of the Old Barge Yard doorway appeared – source and artist unknown – with this rather gnomic figure exiting. And is that a rough sleeper or a drunk next to him? More information please!



Some other rather artistic merchants marks:



RJM/VK/HP/MB