

Study Group Outing on August 19th: C.13th Wall Paintings in Horsham St Faith's



Venturing into the wilds outside Norwich, organised and led by Pat Wright, we went to see the wall paintings in what was the refectory of Horsham St Faith's Priory, now a private house, courtesy of Mr and Mrs Benton. The Benedictine Priory was founded by Robert Fitzwalter and his wife Sybilla and consecrated by Bishop Herbert De Losinga in 1105. The paintings were done later, c.1250-76 by an unknown, possibly itinerant, artist.

Pat gave us a lucid guide to the paintings, based on her UEA dissertation. They depict the figures of Christ, Mary and John the disciple, and the pilgrimage that the Fitzwalters made to Rome. They also show Robert and Sybilla's capture by brigands in France when they prayed to St Faith, the patron saint of prisoners, and were released. They rested at the nearby Benedictine abbey of Conques* where the saint was enshrined. There they vowed to found a monastery dedicated to God and St. Faith which should be a cell of



Conques Abbey. They took back with them two monks who began building the priory at a place called 'kirkscroft' somewhere in the adjacent parish of Horsford but the site was soon abandoned so work was begun at Horsham.

[*There has been some confusion about whether this was Conches in northern France or Conques, just north of Toulouse, but it now seems clear that it should be Conques].

In the 17th century the paintings were covered over. In 1925 Walter R. Rudd relates that after a serious

fire in 1924 he visited the site and saw, '*obscured by many strata of half-burned wallpaper—traces of early medieval figures*' (Norfolk Archaeology (Vol. XXII), In the same volume is a detailed analysis by Prof. E.W.Tristram of the top section of the paintings, the figures of Christ, Mary and John more than twice life size, but there is no mention of the lower section showing the pilgrimage.



Then during restoration work in 1971, 'the removal of panelling of apparently Jacobean date.....revealed what the Chief restorer of the Department of the Environment later described as "a discovery of the utmost importance" ...

.... a pictorial history of how the priory came to be founded by Robert of Caen and his wife Sybilla..... We were able to identify the subject matter **of this fascinating medieval strip cartoon**..... In the fourteenth century this Refectory must have been a very remarkable and colourful room'. (Donovan Purcell in Norfolk Archaeology, Vol.35(4): the latest comprehensive study of the paintings, which can be read on line at:

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/details.xhtml?recordId=3237148>

Click on 'Download').



Another article comments: '**This is the only frater (refectory) in England which survives with a painted reredos**'. (David Sherlock: Norfolk Archaeology 36, 1976).

After looking at the paintings, we visited the parish church and saw the pre- Reformation rood screen, largely intact, and the pre-Reformation painted font, also in good repair. We then repaired to The Swan for a convivial lunch.



Many thanks to Pat for organising such an interesting and enjoyable day to see some unique paintings.

More about the Priory: the NOT So Good Old Days

December 1st 1307: OUTRAGE ON THE PRIORY OF ST. FAITH!

On 1 December, 1307, a commission was appointed in connexion with an outrage on the priory of St. Faith. It was alleged that Robert de Barwe, Hubert le Warner, with twenty-five others, in the time of the late king, forcibly entered the priory, consumed the victuals and other goods, and guarded the gates of the priory for four months, so that the prior could not enter nor the monks within get out; that they carried off his palfrey worth 10 marks; killed in his wood seven swine worth 40s.; threw a monk from off a horse on the king's high road, carried him off to Horsford, spoiled him of his habit and shoes, and imprisoned him; further, that they entered the prior's market at the town of Horsham, collected the toll, pickage, and other dues there, took away from his servants their goods and wares, seized twelve cart-horses worth 30 marks, which were to carry his corn in the autumn, and impounded them for four weeks, whereby most of the corn being left in the fields was trampled under foot by cattle, and the monks had to carry on their backs the small residue that escaped; threw from off a horse his servant appointed for the gathering in of the corn, and carried off the horse; felled his trees, broke his ditches and closes, drove off his cattle, and entered and hunted in his warren, and carried away his hares.

(from *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, ed. William Page(London, 1906), *British History Online*)

Study Group: June 17th

The Comer family at No.121, King Street, aka The Old Barge Room*

Susan Keays spoke about her ancestors who had lived at 121, King Street, and updated us about her previous research into her family. She reminded us that it was her great grandparents, Eliza and William Comer, with their eleven children who, although having moved many times, lived at no. 121 at the time of the 1921 census.

Susan remembers visiting her grandmother, Gertrude Comer, (1904-1983) who remembered her mother, Eliza, who had died in hospital in 1926 aged 52, maybe as a result of complications following the Spanish 'flu epidemic of 1919. Her husband, William, had died in 1934. At this time there were no photos of her great grandparents.

However, Susan's recent DNA test had brought a second cousin to light and they have subsequently exchanged photos. The cousin had a photo of William and Eliza taken in their younger days, but unfortunately not dated but Susan was able, at long last, to see an image of her great grand parents and the similarities between the generations.

There are few of the Comer cousins left and Susan was planning to attend the funeral in Norwich of one of them. After which she is hoping to have made more connections and maybe see other photos of her ancestors.

[Coincidentally, No.121 is also the house where Agnes Palmer lived; she is the subject of a piece of creative writing by one of the Storymakers – see below.]*

The Cleres and their involvement in King Street and the Dragon Hall site

Rosemary Wood's talk centred on the 14th and 15th centuries and included a brief reminder of national events as well as local events. She spoke of the many religious houses and well-known people who lived in this very populous area.

She referred to the Cleres of Ormesby who had lived on the Dragon Hall site, known then as Medday's, from 1330-1420. Sir Robert de Clere was known to royalty and connected to many of the important families of Norfolk and beyond so had entertained many of these people in his home. Although Rosemary knew the Cleres had lived here for 90 years she has not been able to find out when, or to whom, the Hall was sold, possibly to Robert Toppes.

Profile: Rachel Hobson

Rachel is one of the 'new guard' who happily lives opposite Dragon Hall. (We haven't told her yet that she is on the emergency call out list in case of fire, theft, earthquake etc). Her interest in the telling of stories gells happily with the '*Tapestry of Tales*' which is reported on below.

"First of all, let me be clear, I am no historian! I didn't even take history O-level, as my rather insignificant girls' grammar school in Leicester seemed to allow you to drop subjects

apparently randomly. The reason I dropped history is the subject of a little story in itself, but suffice to say my teacher was an ex-nun who was fierce – the least encouraging teacher I’ve ever come across. That experience, however, didn’t stop me becoming a teacher, in English and drama, and later I worked with trainee teachers across a variety of subjects and age ranges.

The first meeting of the Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers I ‘attended’ was on Zoom, in one of the lockdowns. We hadn’t been long in Norwich, and Len (my husband) had attended an event where he met Mary. He expressed an interest in the Heritage Volunteers, but in the end got involved with other things – but I contacted Mary and said that I’d like to know more.

We live on the other side of the road from Dragon Hall, only a few houses further on from the Butterfly Café. I had visited once, before the National Centre for Writing became its custodian, in the days when you could show up during the week, and make your way round the building with, I think, the help of information cards. The building caught my imagination – the potential for telling stories about past people who might have had dealings there. My earlier visit came at a time when I was particularly interested in what is now known as ‘immersive theatre’. The kind of thing where the audience makes its way around a space, piecing together some stories by following groups of actors who perform in different parts of the building. Sometimes audience members can interact with the performers. *Dream Think Speak*, *Punchdrunk* and *The Secret Cinema* are all companies whose work I’ve loved. I suppose that the work of *Curious Directive* in Norwich could in some cases be described as ‘immersive’.

So I came to be interested in Dragon Hall through the potential to tell stories in different ways. The building itself seems to breathe mystery, as well as history. As a guide I love trying to open it up to visitors, to help them glimpse the lives of previous inhabitants and those who worked and earned their living there”.

Study Group May 17th: Shea’s guided walk around ‘Norwich Over the Water’

We met in the courtyard at the Maddermarket and walked to the site of Bullards brewery, stopping en route to look at **Gibson’s pump**. We then went over Coslany bridge and noted the plaque to commemorate the height of the flood water in 1912. Then we went to the site of the **Norfolk Iron Works**, which was responsible for making the first ever wire-netting, some of which was sent to Australia to curtail the spread of rabbits! We then noted the **Baptist Church** where total immersion was, maybe is, the practice and nearby, on St Mary’s Plain, is the Chapel where the Zoar Baptists continue to hold their meetings. The chapel was opened 1886 and, according to the plaque on the outside, is known as ‘Strict and Particular’.

We saw what was left of the many shoe factories, most of which have been converted into flats and offices. At the industry’s height there were over 30 factories employing over 12,000 people; now there are none. We continued to St Augustine’s where we went into one of the many ‘yards’ that are a feature of Norwich. This one is called **Whip and Nag**

Yard after the pub which once stood there. It may have been known as the Whip and NOG as that is a Norfolk word for a small drink.

We continued, (in an orderly fashion!) to **Calvert Street**, formerly Snaylgate in Scandinavian times when Norwich was known as Northwic. We then saw **Willie White's cottage**, the only remaining weaver's cottage in Norwich. It is next to what was a brush factory, not far from where there was the **Singer Sewing machine factory**, which is commemorated in Singer Court. Also nearby is the last chimney of the many that were all part of this industrial area of Norwich.

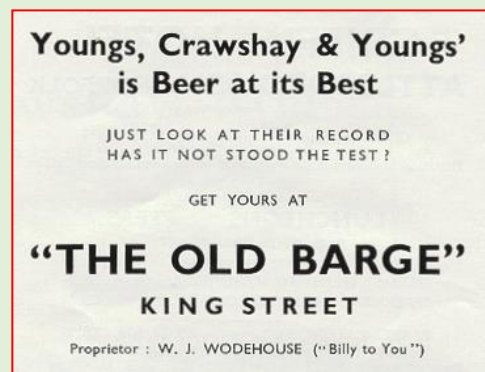
Nearby, and visible from the inner ring road, are **Doughty's Alms houses**, opened in the 17th century and endowed by William Doughty, who gave each of the 24 men and 8 women a purple cloak every two years. We then walked into Colegate via the back of **Bacon House**, which is an Elizabethan courtyard house, to view the **Old Meeting House**. Unfortunately it was closed, but was possibly the first non-conformist chapel in the country after the passing of the Act of Toleration. After that we went to the **Octagon Chapel**, which was open, such a lovely building. At this point we had completed Shea's tour and we dispersed, although a few of us continued, past the front of Bacon house to the **Weaver's Arms** for lunch.

It was a splendid walk, the weather was lovely, the information was amazing and we were all delighted by **the anecdotes Shea seemed to have at his fingertips**. A fascinating area and the 12 people who went really enjoyed it, as for most of us it was a new area of Norwich to explore. Thank you, Shea.

'Hail Norwich!': Poems from the 'Not The National Centre for Writing'

On the Occasion of the Opening of the Norwich to Lowestoft Ship Canal 1833
by William Cole, Clerk of Works

Hail Norwich! Hail this memorable day,
Raise the loud peal, your waving flags display.
All classes unite with just applause,
And greet the Champions of your City's cause:
Soon she will see your stately vessels ride,
With canvas spreading to the swelling tide!



Breaking News 1541

BEARDS BANNED - BAD FOR BUSINESS

By the Acts of Court of 1541 freemen of the Mercers' Company of London who wore beards were commanded to come before the Master and Wardens and explain 'for what intent they wear them' and to shave them off or face a penalty.

In 1542 Robert Gouche was required to appear and was asked to shave his beard but he complained that he **'could not abide the razor on his face'**. So he was dismissed.

[Obviously fake news: it's well known that beards convey gravitas, probity and wisdom. Ed.]

A Tapestry of Tales - creative interpretations of the history of Dragon Hall

On August 17th a small group of us attended the launch of '*A Tapestry of Tales*', a publication, both in print and digital, by the **Dragon Hall Storymakers**, part of the 'Stepping Into Dragon Hall' project. The free print edition runs to over thirty pages of creative writing and original research; of particular note is a separate leaflet by Janet Peachman about **the residents of St Ann Lane Yards**, i.e. the yards behind Dragon Hall on the site of the present north wing which gives much more detail about them than our study of the census did - see our website re 'Dragon Hall block Study'..

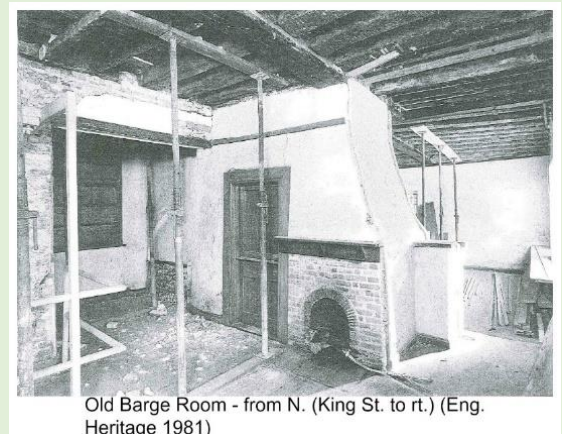
It is fascinating also to see how the Storymakers have used much of our research into the various residents of Dragon Hall, including the dragon! Franca Akue has even managed to use **the scrap of wallpaper** in the Great Hall, one of the least prominent but most evocative reminders of the residents, to inspire a poem - see below.

PLACE	HOUSES No. of Houses or Cottages	NAMES of each Person who abode therein the preceding Night.	AGE and SEX		PROFESSION, TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, or of INDEPENDENT MEANS.
			Male	Female	
King St.	1	William Palmer	57		Gen. Manager
		Priscilla	45		
		William	20		Book-keeper
		Ann	20		
		John	15		
		Ellie	10		
		Agnes	10		

Lucyl Harrison has also written an interesting piece about **Agnes Palmer**, one of the residents who, to my mind, has always stood out from the mass of Census data, made all the more interesting because it was in this space that **William Comer**, the great grandfather of Susan Keeyes, lived - see the report above about Susan's talk.

Extract from 1841 Census, showing Agnes, age 10, ringed in red.

This photo shows the Old Barge Room in 1981, still divided into two, twelve years after the closure of the pub. It is likely that the section nearest to the camera was No.121, the home of Agnes Palmer and William Comer - with his many children.



Extracts from *A Tapestry of Tales* can be seen below and the full text and images can be seen at:

<https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/atapestryoftales/> - highly recommended!

RJM.

Study Group Future Meetings

Monday 16th September: Heather will talk about '**Keels and Fishermen - Shirley Harris and the work of King Street researchers in the 1990s**'.

Monday 21st October: Shea with his talk about **Executions**, in particular, Thomas Bilney.

Study Group: July 15th: Austin Friars and future of Study Group and DHHVs

Mary Bradford gave a summary of her previous talk about the Austin Friary on King Street.

The future of our Group was discussed as both **Mary and Heather would like step down** from their current roles and were **looking for volunteers to become more involved** with the organisation of our group. Susan offered to be an assistant to Heather in her role as co-ordinator with the management of Dragon Hall. Mary agreed to continue chairing the Study Group meetings but would like someone to take over from her.

Some Extracts from *A Tapestry of Tales*

The Missing Bits by Franca Akue (extract)

*Where have they gone?
Where are we in history?
The Old Barge was my home,
My boys were born here
And their boys and girls were born here
Our joys, laughter and tears
Are in the walls of the Old Barge.*

*Why am I not remembered?
Where is my lovely wallpaper?
With which I adorned my bridal chamber?
It is a priceless piece of my history
What was my offence in history?
That I am so violently torn and scraped away.*



The River Song by Mike Dolby (extract)

*We moor up at Yarmouth, and move on to keels,
And we carry and carry and carry up river,*

*Barge 'cross the Wensum as quick as we feels,
Yes we'll tarry and tarry and tarry up river and roam,*

*Our vessel is weighed down with goods that'll trade,
And we'll carry and carry and carry up river,*



The Will and Testament of Agnes Palmer

by Lucyl Harrison (extract)

[Agnes Palmer was ten years old when she moved to number 121 King Street with her parents. For 71 years, Agnes lived in a sub-divided space that is now the room at the southern end of the 'Old Barge Room, and died at the age of 81 in the Spring of 1913 – the year before the first World War began.]

*The time is come – I must depart from you,
Dragon Hall. I am no man: I am a
feme sole, shaped a life according to mine own.
Though I am grieved to go, I have lived
despite no vote, no credit, nor education.
I never bore child, nor wedded,
but never did I regret it.
There's too much work in being a wife.
If I had married a man, I would have
been mother, maid, nurse, housekeeper,
launderess, seamstress and scrub.*

Agnes Palmer in the census records

1881

Elizabeth PALMER	Hd	Wid	67	Invalid
Agnes PALMER	Dau	(?)	51	Tailoress

1891 (No. 121)

Elizabeth PALMER	Hd	S	78	Lodging house keep'r
Agnes PALMER	Si	S	61	Vest maker
George STAFFORD	Lo	S	56	Bricklayer
George STOER	Lo	S	26	Labourer/ bricklayer

1901 (No. 121 – 3 rooms)

Elizabeth PALMER	Hd	S	88	Own means
Agnes PALMER	Sis	S	70	ditto

1911 (No. 121 – 3 rooms)

Agnes PALMER	Hd	S	81	Private means
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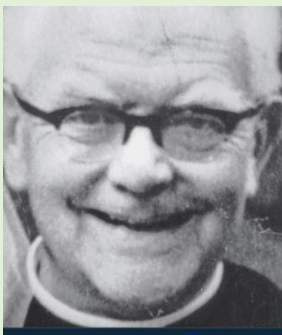


A Tale of Two Corbels by Mike Dolby (extract)

'What even is a corbel?' said the first figure to the other.

'Well it's a, um, well it's us isn't it?' The second figure replied.

The two small figures in question were carved into the face of the corbel protruding from the south end of Dragon Hall. They were always like this. Had always been like this. They were first chiselled into the venerable face of the building when it was constructed as a trading hall by Robert Toppes in the 15th century. They had seen a lot over the years, and what they saw, they argued about. The figure on the left would ask a question of their counterpart on the right and the figure on the right would invariably get frustrated with his craggy companion and raise his hands in frustration.



'**The Quiet Man of Dragon Hall**' by Jim Lynch is a work of fiction inspired by the real-life figure of Father Seear, priest to the parish of St Peter Parmentergate. In the mid-20th century Father Seear lived in the rectory at Dragon Hall, which is now the Writers' Room. Writers needing a quiet space to work can book a desk, thus carrying on its tradition of being a space for reflection and study. You'll know the room belonged to a priest because there is a stained-glass window in the door featuring a cross.



St Ann Lane Yards and their Inhabitants by Janet Peachman [extracts]

4 St Ann Lane: Victor Charles Lefevre & Daisy May Lefevre:

Victor Charles Lefevre was born on 15 June 1897 and baptised in Thorpe Hamlet. His parents, William and Louisa, had 10 children by the time Victor was about 13 years old. However, four of these children had died; such a terrible loss for families.

During the First World War, when he was 18, Victor joined the Royal Navy. His Service number was SS6354. He was in the Navy for six years and demobbed when he was 24.



14 St Ann Lane 1953

We moved into Rose Cottage (for that was its name) on January 29th 1953. My great-grandmother had lived there before this and had recently died leaving the cottage empty, my father had not been long out of the Army and was offered Rose Cottage as a home, by his mother. My great grandmother had inherited Rose Cottage from her father, Mr. Brighty, who was a fishmonger.

Email from Nick Leatherland to DHHVs 6.8.98 about the NCW's existing cottage, the only surviving dwelling from St Ann Lane Yards

10 St Ann Lane

Albert Edward Brandish & Millicent Clare Brandish

Albert and Millicent were married on 3 October 1931 in Sprowston. He was a boot and shoe operative, so his eye trouble must have improved. They lived at 10 St Ann Lane in 1936 and by 1939 they had escaped the slums and were living on Morse Road, Thorpe, on a new council estate with modern facilities. They had six children together

9 St Ann Lane

Arthur John Scott & Doris May Scott

Doris and Arthur were married on 24 December, a Christmas wedding, at St Marks in Lakenham. Arthur was a wool worker at the time. They lived in St Ann Lane in 1936 and were rehoused, living on the newly built Larkman Estate in 1939, with their 11 year old son, Kenneth. Arthur was a wood machinist and Daisy a housewife.

..... And don't forget: Dragon Hall is open (free) Sunday to Wednesday 10.0 to 3.0

('Free'? I seem to be three marks down on the whole deal, RT ...)

11 St Ann Lane: John Robert Youngs & Eliza Youngs

In 1921, they were both living at No 11 St Ann Lane. It appears that they had no children of their own but were looking after a niece, Dorothy, whose mother had died. They lived at St Ann for over 15 years, until they were rehoused in a new council housing estate in Upper Hellesdon.

