

**Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers
& Local History Study Group
NEWSLETTER No. 18 November 2024**



Meeting on November 18th: new Chair

We had a well attended meeting to review our roles and activities. **Rachel Hobson was warmly welcomed** as the new **Chair of the Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers** and also as Chair of our Study Group. **We thanked Heather and Mary** for their sterling work over the last few years as Chair of the DHHVs and of the Study Group respectively. We look forward with confidence to continuing and strengthening our activities in co-operation with the NCW. Heather has circulated a full report of the meeting.

(We noted that it's only just over two years until **the 600th anniversary of the DH trees being cut down** – thinking caps on please for how we can celebrate!)

Jim Marriage

For all of us associated with Dragon Hall it was so sad to hear of the death of Jim Marriage. Only a year ago we were celebrating his 90th birthday in the Great Hall and listening to his reminiscences about the changes he has witnessed.

Jim played a major role in the development of Dragon Hall following its "rediscovery" in the 1970s-1980s. When the building was first opened to the public he was one of the guides who braved the cold and the dust. He



then became Chair of the Friends of the Norfolk & Norwich Heritage Trust between 2005-2013 when he helped fire-up



enthusiasm and support from scores of individuals. He was responsible for raising vital and substantial amounts of funding to preserve the fabric of Dragon Hall and make it more widely accessible to the people of Norwich, Norfolk and further afield. Jim completed his National Service in Germany, and with his wife June he travelled widely and brought his knowledge of the Hanseatic towns to a short schools project and after retiring, he took a degree

in German and remained active in local history and guiding, including involvement with the Blue Badge Guides, Thorpe Hamlet History Group, and Friends of the Rosary Cemetery.

We will remember him for his love for this city and particularly the Rosary Cemetery. On a Study Group tour of the Rosary Cemetery he entertained us hugely with his detailed knowledge of many of the characters buried there. Jim was held in high respect by us all; he was a delightful friend with a gentle but committed attitude and personality and he will be greatly missed.

Heather Pfeiffer & Adrian O'dell

Heritage Open Day: September 8th

The tours were very successful and Dragon Hall welcomed some 200 visitors who enjoyed the displays and videos created by the recent 'Stepping Into Dragon Hall' project and also the video about Robert Toppes, 'A Life Remembered'. Nikki and Rachel's tours of King Street, from the Music House to the mid-section, were fully booked.



Christmas Social Event

Wednesday December 11th at 12.00 at the Coach & Horses, Bethel Street. .. and there's a Quiz! (Please bring a pen or pencil).

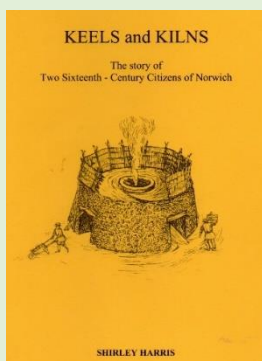
All welcome but, if you haven't already done so, please select your tapas from the pub's website, inform Valerie of your choices **before the end of November:** (vjkginger@gmail.com), and bring cash, including a tip, on the day.



Study Group Report: Monday September 16th

Heather gave us a talk about **Shirley Harris and the work of the King Street Research Group** from 1981. This is her summary:

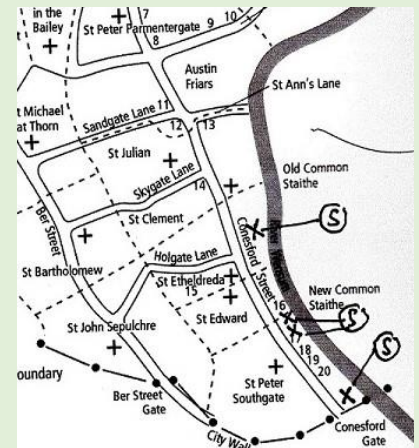
In 1981 the King Street Research Group began meeting each month at Wensum Lodge with Adult Education tutor **Chris Barringer** of the Cambridge Extra-Mural Studies Department and advised by medievalist **Elizabeth Rutledge** from U.E.A. The aim was to research the history of King Street, formerly Conesford Street. Shirley Harris was one of the group who over the next 25 years produced 7 short publications* about some of the trades and lives of fishermen, keelmen, limeburners, carpenters, glaziers, bakers, fullers, rafmen, hosiers and friars and the buildings both east and west of Conesford Street in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They used published material and city records and wills from Norfolk Record Office. These publications can be found in the Heritage Library in the Forum and a few are still available for purchase from the Dragon Hall Study Group at our monthly meetings. Inevitably the group were drawn into the development of Dragon Hall. They were keen observers and followers of the archaeological excavation and its accompanying research in the 1990s.



Shirley was still a member of this group when I joined in 2005 and I was sad to read of her death a few months ago, aged 92. The EDP obituary reminded me that Shirley came from Great Yarmouth and for a time was secretary of the Great Yarmouth Archaeological Society. After retirement she involved herself in research. With Mary Rodgers and others she worked on material about the Conesford riverside staithes and those that lived and worked nearby. Her two booklets '**Keels and Kilns**' and '**Flat Fysshe in the River and Coalfisshe in the Mud**' tell us about men who built up sufficient wealth from the river and its environs to become property owners. The kilns of limeburners like **Richard Nixon** which could be up to thirty feet high

burnt along the hillside to the west of the parishes of St Peter Parmentergate, St Julian, St Etheldreda and St Peter Southgate.

Along the river Wensum were the two staithe for which tolls had to be paid to the city. Others were maintained by merchants like Robert Toppes and traders like **John Stingate**, keel man, reed cutter, fisherman, eel catcher and property owner. Shirley tells the stories of Nixon and Stingate both of whom were well known along the street in the mid to late sixteenth century. Both had purchased Freeman status, served as councillors, constables, 'skavengers' and witnessed the wills of neighbours. Their names regularly appeared in the records of the Mayor's court at the Guildhall for breaches of trade regulations and civil actions about payment of money.



S = Stingate properties

In 1569 Stingate was imprisoned but on payment of his fine he was released and reimbursed 36s, enough to buy himself the corset and pike he needed as a member of the South Conesford muster. Both would have witnessed the fire that resulted from the attack by some of Kett's rebels in 1549 on the Common Staithe and might have been involved in the rebuilding over the next 3 years. Stingate died in 1590 and was buried in his parish of St Peter Southgate. As well as his houses he left possessions valued at £80, the most valuable of which was his keel worth £15.

Along with fellow group member Richard Hale, Shirley gives us a fascinating insight into the fishermen's community around the church of St Peter Southgate located just within the city walls at the southern end of the street. In his booklet on '**The Churches of King Street**' Richard tells us that it belonged to St Benet's Abbey to which it owed one pound of incense a year. St Peter Southgate was a prosperous parish which could afford some rebuilding in the fifteenth century when it was home to the guild of the fishermen represented there by an image of St Nicholas, patron saint of sailors.

May Wallace in her '**Medieval People of Norwich**' tells us of Thomas Holston who died in 1475 and asked to be buried 'in the church of St Petre of Suthgate' leaving 6d to the high altar in that church and 20d to 'the Fysshers Gylde' there. Over hundred years later neither Nixon or Stingate made similar donations. The Reformation had clearly changed the religious life of the people of Conesford Street in the intervening years. The church of St Peter Southgate closed in the late nineteenth century and is now a ruin. Opposite on the river bank where the fishermen once dwelt with their yards and ponds there is now a block of flats. Shirley tells us that when she was writing in 1993 there was on the site of the **New Common Staithe** the remains of the only surviving keel, in process of restoration.

- The other publications are: *King Street: A Guided Walk*; *The Greyfriars of Norwich*; *The Rivers and Staithe of Tudor Norwich*; *The Ecclesiastical History of the Parish of St Peter Parmentergate*.
- Note: There is also the excellent '*Story of a House*' about Jurnet's house. (King Street must be one of the best researched streets in the country!)

Any more Volunteers

.... for our Archive Project or for our External Talks team?

We are having briefing meetings: for the **Talks team on Monday 13th January**, and for the **Archives team on Monday 27th January**, both at 10.30 at Dragon Hall. Come along to find out more – no obligation involved! Please contact Adrian (adrianodellwth@gmail.com) if you plan to attend.

Profile: Mary Bradford

We have lived in Norfolk since 1973 and in the same house in Norwich since 1983 but I don't yet feel a local and certainly still have a lot to learn about this special part of the world.

I was born in Cardiff during World War11, the eldest of seven children but all my grandparents had come to Wales from Ireland. In my childhood Cardiff wore its



Welshness lightly, though we did learn a little of the language at school and celebrated St David's Day as well as St Patrick's. To coin a phrase 'I was the first of my family to go to university' and read History at Cardiff and then went to London to do a post graduate teaching certificate where I met my husband. Over the next few years I taught history in London. We then moved to the Hampshire coast and shortly after I 'retired' to look after our two daughters.

I returned to work in the late 1970s after we had moved to Norfolk but mostly taught in Middle Schools where I spent the rest of my career. As a result of which after retirement I decided to return to university to study Medieval History again. I very

much enjoyed this and having completed my M.A. looked for some suitable volunteering activities.

At the time Dragon Hall had just completed its big redevelopment and was actively recruiting volunteers so I signed up as a **Room Steward** but soon found myself doing many other things, even becoming competent (just about) with the shop till. From the beginning I felt I had found a real home; **Jim & June Marriage** were among the first established volunteers I met. Everyone was so kind and supportive and it was lovely to have the opportunity to share the magnificent building with visitors.

Our original research group was led by the late, great **Chris Barringer** from whom I learned so much about the history of the Hall and the local area. It has been a great pleasure to coordinate our present Study Group and a real joy to share and learn together. Involvement in Dragon Hall research has led me into improving my Latin so that I could read original documents - this is still a work in progress but another pleasure!

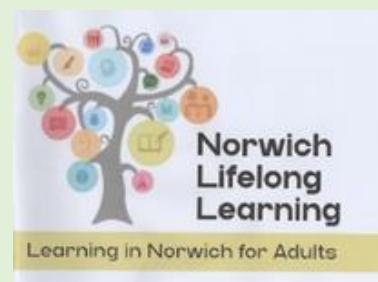


Chris Barringer

Circumstances mean I need to take more of a back seat but I hope to continue active involvement with our Dragon Hall group in the years to come.

Upcoming Events

A talk on '**King Street: If Stones Could Speak**' by Frances and Michael Holmes on **Friday 6th December** from 10.30am at King's Centre, King Street. This is part of the AGM of **Norfolk Lifelong Learning*** but guests are welcome. Places can be booked via email to info@norwichlifelonglearning.co.uk



*The Spring and Summer programme for NLL (Norwich Lifelong Learning) is now available at www.norwichlifelonglearning.co.uk - recommended!

Norwich Society Talks at The Forum

Thursday 28th November at 10:30am: *Pablo Fanque's Fair and The Victorian Circus* by Gareth Davies.

Saturday 7th December at 2.30pm: *Queen Elizabeth I's Progress to Norwich in 1578: Hidden Agendas?* by Victor Morgan.

Members £4, non – members £8 – book on the Society's website.

Study Group Report: Monday October 21st

Shea gave us an interesting talk about executions in Norwich and has supplied this summary of his talk:

Reluctant Executioners

Under Henry VIII England had begun the slow drift towards Protestantism. As soon as Mary took the throne she wasted no time in turning the clock back. The goldsmiths and silversmiths were happy to turn out the chalices and sacred vessels required for the Catholic mass, but not everyone was content to return to the old ways. Many sought refuge abroad. For a few it was a denial of their new-found faith and were determined to resist.

One of these was **Elizabeth Cooper** who stood up during a service at St Andrews church and stated she would not renounce her Protestant faith. The sheriff, Thomas Sotherton ignored the outburst and it took an irate man to rouse him, saying, "Master Sheriff, will you suffer this!"

With an unrepentant heretic on his hands he was duty bound to hand Cooper over to the Cathedral chancellor, Michael Dunning for trial. She was condemned to death and went to the stake along with a King's Lynn man who had been betrayed by an informer. In the crowd at Lollards Pit was a young woman, **Cecily Ormes** who declared that she 'would pledge thee of the same cup that thou drink on'. She was overheard by a supporter of the Catholic restoration, John Corbet. He seized her and handed her over to Chancellor Dunning for examination. Under questioning Dunning offered to free her 'if she would go to church and keep her tongue', an offer rejected by Ormes. He was 'loathe to condemn her', considering that she was 'an ignorant, unlearned and foolish woman'. Nonetheless he did condemn her and after 10 months in the Cathedral prison he turned her over to the city authorities at the Guildhall. They too were reluctant jailers, keeping her for nearly 3 months before the sentence was carried out. Was this to give them time to persuade their prisoner to keep her faith to herself and avoid being burned at the stake?

We know that in religious matters the city kept a low profile. In fact they sought to avoid conflicts which might bring their impartiality, and even their authority into question.

Citizens did bring accusations of a religious nature to the Guildhall, where magistrates dealt with offenders lightly or not at all. In one case in 1535 Thomas Myles publicly criticised a number of religious doctrines, including the veneration of saints and images. He was brought before the court but it seems that no action was taken.

Oversight of burnings was a terrible task that the Mayor and Sheriffs had to undertake on behalf of the cathedral authorities. Cecily was taken from the Guildhall to Lollards Pit between 7 and 8 in the morning before a crowd of 200 and the two Sheriffs, brothers Thomas and Leonard Sotherton. She said her prayers and the fires were lit. **Fox's Book of Martyrs** has it 'she yielded her life unto the Lord as quietly as if she had been in a slumber'.

No such efficiency attended the aftermath of **Thomas Bilney's** execution in 1531. The Lord Chancellor Thomas Moore wanted to know if Bilney had recanted at the last moment and summoned as witnesses the Mayor Edward Reed and Alderman John Curatt who offered conflicting stories. Reed changed his mind about Bilney's recantation and even went as far as to claim that he had nothing he needed to renounce. Curatt, quite improbably, said he hadn't heard Bilney's words as he was tying his shoelaces. Bishop Nix was later charged with executing Bilney without authorization from the state and his property was confiscated.

Bilney wanted reform of practices such as pilgrimages and praying to saints and images. He had recanted earlier and was imprisoned for a year in the Tower of London by Cardinal Wolsey . The Cardinal was only interested in prosecuting Lutherans which left Bilney full of remorse for his recantation. Bilney's case illustrates the turbulence of the times. Five years after his death the sale of images and relics were banned and in eight years the bible in English could be found in every parish church. In the Guildhall dungeon he was befriended by Sheriff Thomas Necton. His favourite text from Isaiah was '*When thou walkest through fire, thou shalt not be burned*' He remained a Catholic to the end which does call into question the plaque on the east wall of the Guildhall which declares him the first Protestant martyr. Perhaps he should best be seen as a reformer on the path to a changed religion.

A Vanished World: Were those the days?

As part of a correspondence about the demise of the old-fashioned Department Store in the latest *London Review of Books* - which also included a reference to the survival of **Jarrolds** - I found this letter about **Buntings** store which for a hundred years was on the site of today's Marks and Spencers:

*My mother in law worked there from 1926 to 1941 [as part of a seven year apprenticeship]. She worked in every department in turn, and acquired a lifelong appreciation of beautiful things. She also imbibed the unspoken rules of service: deference, politeness and an always smiling face. The assistants lived in dormitories above the shop and worked a six day week On Saturday night after cashing up she cycled home the thirteen miles to Dereham with her dirty washing strapped to the back of her bicycle. The following day, with clean linen, she cycled back to Norwich. Buntings advertised itself as '**The Store for All**'. A classical trio played every day from noon till six in the tea room She described it as one of the happiest periods of her life.*

Frances Donnelly