

Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers & Local History Study Group NEWSLETTER No.20 August 2025



Study Group Meetings

April 28th: After some discussion of the recruitment of tour guides and the organisation of tours we proceeded to the important business of the day: a celebration of Heather's 80 years with her delicious lemon cake and non-alcoholic prosecco!

May 19th: we welcomed members of the NCW's 'Storymakers' who have added greatly to our knowledge of residents of the Dragon Hall Block.

We then heard from Susan Keays about **113 King Street** (today the NCW's reception, late 'the butchers shop') and the Creed and Comer families, an interesting Powerpoint talk with excerpts from 'Jack Creed, a Memoir' (to be found in the Heritage Centre at The Forum). Susan's second cousin, David Creed, whom she has met through her research, was



present; he has other photos and information about their shared family.

Richard then gave us '**More Stories of the Dragon Hall Block**', a resume of his research into Dragon Hall and the immediate vicinity. Of particular interest were tales of the Slum Clearance programme of the 1930s, using extracts from Jack Creed's memoir, with readings from Adrian, Michael and Susan to give added interest.

Jack Creed & mother Lily

June 16th: Frances spoke eloquently about the life of **Sir Thomas Erpingham** 1357-1428. There is no biography, but much is known of him from other sources. He was a contemporary of Mother Julian. He fought in Europe alongside John of Gaunt and befriended Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV. He went on the first Crusade in 1392. He distinguished himself at Agincourt in 1415, later retiring to Norfolk. He is remembered for the building of the **Erpingham gateway** into the Cathedral and almost certainly visited Dragon Hall. He also makes a brief appearance in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.



Erpingham also has a connection with the **Austin Friars** site next door: in 1419, he paid for the east chancel window of the church of the Friary to be glazed. The window contained eight panes, containing dedications to 107 noblemen or knights who died without producing an heir since the reign of Edward III. The building was demolished in 1547 after the priory was suppressed in 1538.

Mary then gave us a transcript of his will. The laborious script of the medieval script was explained thoroughly and with great knowledge. Unfortunately there was insufficient time to complete it and the plan is to do this at the October meeting.

July 21st: Nikki gave a very informative talk about the '**Dragon Hall Information Bank**' (aka 'DH Info Bank') of which she is now 'The Custodian'. It has been compiled over many years by Richard and contains a wealth of information, photos, maps etc, of which most of the people at the meeting were unaware. It is a dynamic folder, in that it can be viewed, added to, and copied, by anyone with the link, available on request by email to Nikki:
nikkimorris2007@hotmail.co.uk

Much of the content is also in the **DH Digital Archive** but it is not catalogued and can easily be searched, using Windows File Explorer. Many of the items are also on our website. As an illustration, Nikki put the name 'Joyce Gurney Read' in to Search and many files came up; she has also put up a page asking for volunteer tour guides.

Heather followed this with a talk about **Joyce Gurney Read**. She has researched this Norwich lady who was passionate about the history of the city. She was born in 1926 and devoted much of her life to writing about Norwich and archiving a wealth of information. Heather offered to keep a record of anyone wanting to borrow anything from our 'JGR' box-file, which includes maps and information about many of the large industrial firms who had such an impact on Norwich, the UK and the world. Heather then read out some of the quirky transcripts of recordings of Norwich people's memories that JGR had accumulated. A large amount of material collected by JGR can also be found in the Heritage Centre in the Forum Library.

NCW News

Dragon Hall is currently **open free on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays** (10.00 am to 3.00 pm) and will be until the end of the October half-term. Visitor numbers vary, but the **Family Open Days** have been particularly successful; these take place on Sundays and in school holidays. The audio tour is now firmly established; it is also available in hard copy for anyone who can't access it on their phone.

The Writers' Room is now open for bookings (free) by writers, translators, and artists.

Heritage Open Days

Dragon Hall will be open on September 14th and 21st. We are providing tours and helpers. **Booking on line** for Norfolk HODs opens on **Wednesday, 27th August**. There are two **King Street** events on page 7 at <https://forum-assets-candour.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets/hods/2025/norfolk-hods-2025-brochure.pdf>

Future Meetings of the Study Group

Please note: **no meeting in August.**

Wednesday, September 17th : there will be a **guided tour of the Sainsbury Centre**. If anyone else wishes to come please contact Pat asap on 62patalan@gmail.com,

Reminder: **Meet at 10 a.m.** in the Centre. It is £5 a head and if you would like coffee/tea and biscuits on arrival it is another £3, all payable on the day. A table could be made available for lunch if anyone wants to stay on.

October 20th: Mary will complete her discussion of the **will of Sir Thomas Erpingham**

November 17th: Valerie and Richard will introduce **some medieval wills and inventories**, mainly of local Conesford people; they are a rich source of information about people's lifestyle. I have a collection of (digitised) transcriptions of wills and inventories and it would be a good opportunity for others to contribute, briefly. If you would like to read one of the documents before the meeting and then take us through it, please email richard@dragonhallnorwich.org.uk. The documents largely speak for themselves and no special knowledge is required. if you would like to see one, there is no obligation to talk about it at the Study Group - and no paleography skills required! RJM

Caister Roman Project: Open Days

The Caistor Roman Project dig Open Days this year will be on **Saturday 23rd** and **Saturday 30th August**. Park at the Caistor Hall Hotel, Caistor St Edmund, where the CRP will be excavating part of the triple ditch that runs through the paddock (so don't go to the Roman town or the temple site). Admission and parking will be free. **Guided tours** will also be available each day at 10.00 and 2.00 at a cost of £9.38 (children free) and these need to be booked in advance on Eventbrite [here](#).



Family Activities:

A range of archaeologically-themed drop-in activities will be on offer between 10:00 and 15:00. These include crafting, metal-detecting, finds handling, ancient board games, quizzes, and storytelling.

CRP's two Summer Dig 2025 lectures:

Monday 18th August, 7.00pm at Caistor Hall Hotel Speaker: Professor Will Bowden

Monday 1st September, 7.00pm at Caistor Hall Hotel Speaker: Jan Bird

Search for tickets on EVENTBRITE. Both lectures will shed a different light on Venta Icenorum and the Romano-British people who lived within and outside the walls of the town.

Royal Castle Is Re-Born!

In case you have been on the other side of the world: a reminder that the Castle Keep has re-opened after a £27.5 million project. Channel 4 are showing a **documentary about the project on Sunday 24th August at 7.30 p.m.**

The Gallery of Medieval Life: This spectacular new gallery has been created in partnership with the British Museum - its first medieval gallery outside London. It contains over 900 original medieval objects, drawing on Norfolk Museums' nationally significant collections, and the long-term loan of over fifty treasures from the British Museum.



The Great Hall

King Street News

Idly googling (is that an official pastime now ...?) for info re Sir Thomas Erpingham I found this audio file on our own NCW's website:

*'Priory, Friary, Pulpit and Pub', a piece of nonfiction, intended to be listened to as a short audio experience. It takes listeners **on a walk along King Street** and its many public houses, of which only one remains. Both this and Jim's short story 'The Quiet Man of Dragon Hall' (aka **Father Seear**) give a sense of both the quietude and clamour that was ever present on King Street.'*

You can hear it or read the text here:

<https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/writing-hub/priory-friary-pulpit-pub/>

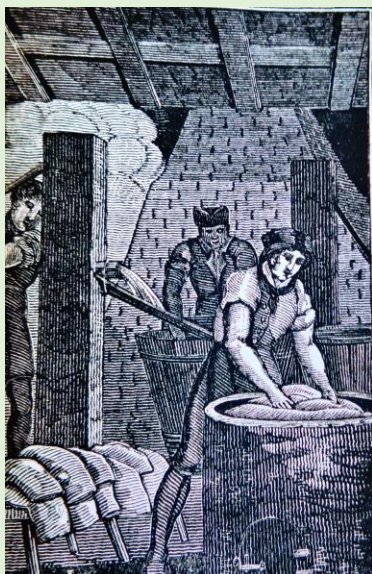
This led me to **The Ferry Boat Inn:** in 2011 the plan was for a backpacker's hostel, and more recently for 55 homes, i.e. apartments – as shown in the picture below. Since 2022 very little seems to have happened. **'Fag Ash Lil'** played the piano here until 1989 at the age of 82. In 1993 home-made fruit pie with cream could be had for £1.25.



Norwich Textiles II – The Dyeing Industry

Following on from the extracts from Michael Nix's book, 'A Global Story' in the last Newsletter is this article about dyeing:

Dyers at work



“During the mid-eighteenth century, Norwich and London were pre-eminent in the dyeing industry: the two centres dyed and finished most of the fine worsted goods produced in the country. John James, an historian of the English worsted industry, attributed a ‘beauty and permanence’ to Norwich dyes, so much so that manufacturers from all over England chose to send their stuffs to the city. Detailed knowledge about the work of Norwich’s dyers, their labour vital in transforming materials from plain, patterned and colourless fabrics into desirable consumer products, is virtually unknown. Mellor and Cardwell note that dyeing was ‘a highly individual technique and secrecy was a necessary part of the Art’. During his visit to Norwich in 1784, the Frenchman Maximilien de Lazowski complained: “We haven’t seen a dye-house, although I have asked several times to do so. They are extremely jealous in guarding their processes”.

Dyers washing fabric at Coslany Bridge {John Berney Ladbrooke}

By keeping secret his technique of dyeing bombazine (a mixture of worsted and silk) a beautiful black, the innovative Norwich dyer and chemist Michael Stark, cornered the market; his dyeworks received most of this fabric produced in the city, in Kidderminster and in Yorkshire. Dyers such as Stark, in order to match colours precisely to meet consumer requirements, kept pattern books containing recipes and samples of colours. Yet, even though Norwich was a major centre of dyeing, no master dyer recipe books, as far as it is known, survive from the period under review.



While Norwich’s textiles flowed outwards on a global scale, organic and inorganic dyestuffs came into the city from many parts of the world as well from Britain. To our knowledge no in-depth research has been carried out into the city’s role in this trade. Globally, eighteenth century dyers had access to about thirty dyestuffs and fifteen mordants”.

[*Mordant: a substance used to fix or bind the dye to the fabric]

(Extract from an article by [Jocelyn Alcántara-García](#) & [Michael Nix](#):
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s40494-018-0242-x>)



More stories about residents of the Dragon Hall Block

Extracts from an interview with James Gosling of Old Barge Yard.

(The date and source of this transcript are unknown but it seems likely that it refers to dates between the wars or possibly pre- WWI. An extract from it was used in Richard's talk re DH Block residents on May 19th.

So you went down to the Old Barge?

When I was about four, when my mother got married, see - my father, he used to work on the railway, and this was November and the river was frozen, and the flat- bottomed boat what they used to all stand up in - about forty or fifty people, and the chap what took them across the river to work in the railway sheds, and this morning this thing toppled over and everybody went in the river, and my father came home - this is what my mother told us - my father came home and he changed everything, and then he went back to work again, and within a month he was dead. 'Cause of what they call galloping... consumption. Ours was 20 Old Barge Yard.

He died after you'd already moved there?

No, no. He died when I was about two.

Why did you move to Old Barge Yard?

I don't know, I was too young. We just simply went in Old Barge Yard 'cause that was two families in this one house, next to the Old Barge. Next to us was Curtis, their house joined ours, and then you went down the yard as far as Mr Eibbit.

So starting with the Old Barge Pub itself

Oh yeah, the Old Barge, I knew that quite well, especially when I got older, we used to go in there and have a drink and that sort of thing.

And there was a family there - there was Billy Read and John Read. Now John, he was a clerk at Mann Egerton's, the car place. Billy, he was our age.

And when I got about 7 or 8, I used to go down the Old Barge cellar. Their father, he used to buy these sleepers and they'd cut them up in lengths of about 12 inches or so, we used to sit down and cut kindling you see; there was one place there, like an archway, that was all bricked up, and they used to reckon that there was a tunnel to the cathedral, where these here old monks used to wander around; they reckon all around King Street is tunnelled, nearly.

And if old Billy used to come up from the cellar, I used to come up [too], I daren't stay down there on me own. In them days they reckon that was the coolest beer in the summer and the coldest beer in winter, down there. I don't know I ought to say this - when Robinson packed up, there was another chap come in from Lowestoft, took the Old Barge over. He weren't there long 'fore he used to put water in the beer, Youngs and Crawshaw's, they canted him out of there... They come and tested it, and he was out.

But many rooms did you have?

Four, big rooms. The bedroom used to be partitioned off with blankets, like a screen you know. There'd be my sisters and us boys.

How many in the family?

Well [it] was a big family. My mother was a widow and she had five of us. And my stepfather, he was a widower and he had eight. When they got married they had four more but they were never all at home. My stepfather Jack he was in the army. I suppose there'd be about 10 or 11, or something.

The West Norfolk Hoard

“The public can now see this remarkable medieval treasure for the very first time, after Norwich Castle Museum received more than £300,000 to acquire it.

The hoard, uncovered in batches between 2014 and 2020 at an undisclosed location near King's Lynn, contains 129 gold coins. It appears to have been buried in about 610 AD, based on the date of the latest coins. Most of them are Frankish tremisses, solid gold coins minted in the Merovingian Frankish Kingdoms that occupied much of modern-day France, Germany, Switzerland and the Low Countries.

They were the first coins made and used in Europe after the fall of the Roman empire and predate the first gold coinage made in Anglo-Saxon England.



The West Norfolk hoard is one of only eight hoards of this coin type known from Europe and only the third from the UK. Of the 129 coins, there are 118 different coin designs and 51 different European mints represented, as well as 10 coins from Byzantium, including two from Constantinople”.

(Source: BBC News <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0qgn9egd7eo>)

Our changing Streetscape



Rouen Road being carved out of the landscape and Morgan's Brewery building (some of us remember it very well!)



A map of 1907, showing the density of housing before the creation of Rouen Road



'HIDDEN' – An Art project at St Peter Mancroft Summer 2025

Many of us have special projects we undertake in the summer. There have been tremendous goings on at the National Centre for Writing, including special days planned for family activities. My summer, however, has been taken up by a fascinating project at St Peter Mancroft. An enormous cube has been suspended in the chancel for two months, with each side of the cube having cutout patterns through which the changing colours of light shone.



The church website says: *HIDDEN is a powerful new installation by acclaimed sculptor Peter Walker. We are invited to uncover what lies beneath the surface of everyday life. From untold stories and veiled identities to the silent echoes of history and culture, this evocative artwork asks us to look beyond the visible – to see the extraordinary in what is often overlooked.*

On each of the six sides are patterns emerging through silhouettes revealing aspects of world culture: history, society, mathematics, nature, representations of inter-connectedness, and of the self.

We have had all sorts of projects arising out of HIDDEN – in particular with schools, residential care homes and charities. People have made and decorated masks and envelopes, written short stories and poems, done HIDDEN-themed drama – and one person has even composed a piece of music in response. It has been a rather exhausting, but often thought-provoking, summer!

Rachel Hobson

And don't forget Norwich Lifelong Learning

<https://norwichlifelonglearning.co.uk/>

A few suggestions:

An Introduction on to the parish churches of medieval Norwich - October 10th (Day School)

By the Pricking of My Thumbs: Witchcraft from antiquity to the present day - December 13th (Day School)

Norwich Shawls - Sept 23rd for 5 weeks (2 hours per session)

The Strangers - Sept 25th for 5 weeks (2 hours per session)

rjm/vk