

Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers & Local History Study Group NEWSLETTER No.21 December 2025



Study Group Meetings & Outing

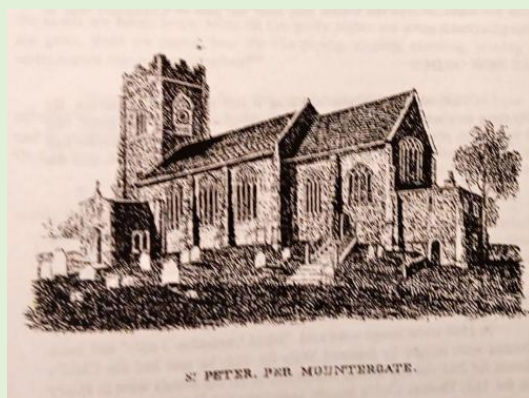
September: on Wednesday 17th September 2025 Pat, Marion, Heather, Jane and Bob went for a private visit to the **Sainsbury Centre of Visual Arts**, led by Polly, a friend of Pat's, who is an experienced guide at the Centre. We looked at a variety of art works from paintings by Freud to Egyptian icons, a real eclectic mix chosen by Polly, but expertly explained, and we had many interesting details and connections pointed out to us. We stayed on for lunch after a most interesting morning and the offer of another tour in 2026 if other members would like to go to the SCVA.

October: Mary presented the final part of her translation of the **Will of Sir Thomas Erpingham**, (1357-1428). She reminded us of the facts that he was a life-time soldier and loyal servant and supporter of the Lancastrian dynasty (John of Gaunt, his son Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, his grandson, Henry V, and even his great grandson, Henry VI.) He was VERY wealthy and was a benefactor to many places in Norfolk, London and Kent. Many local people were mentioned in his Will and he was adept at networking with the important



people in Norwich. He would have been familiar with **John Page's 'Hall House'**, which was incorporated into Dragon Hall.

A most interesting talk and the scholarly way Mary had interpreted his will was very impressive.



November: Valerie and Richard presented some examples of **Coneford wills and inventories**: Valerie's was a detailed look at the will of **Henry Atmere** of St Peter Parmentergate dated 1559. She pointed out that it was very much a **post - Reformation will** with no mention of St Mary and the saints etc. We noted that he asked to be buried '*against the porche*' of the church where his father and mother were buried: was this a sign of wealth and status?

[St Peter Parmentergate - Engraving by John Sillett 1828, from *Churches of King Street* by Richard Hale]

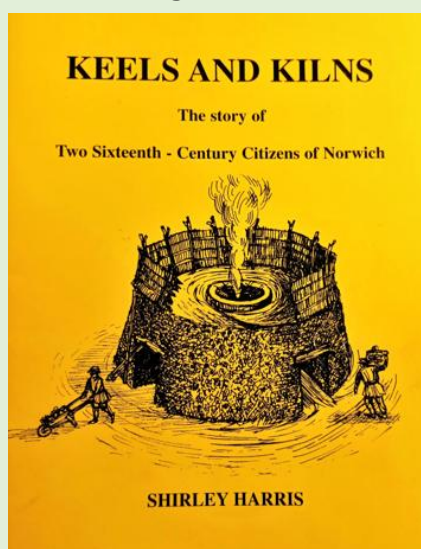
His *'stufte of household'* which he left to his wife seems to have referred to general household items, not to 'stuffs', the name also given to Norwich textiles at the time. He seems to have had a house in St Anrew's parish but lived in a house called **'The College'**, presumably in St Peter Parmentergate. (N.B. It's very unusual for a house to be named in a will of this period). He also left a 'grounde' in Horsford to his wife. He made bequests to Jane and Robert Tooke and we speculated about how they fitted into the family. He left several silver spoons and several silver and gilt salt cellars, probably a sign of some wealth. In addition to executors, he also appointed a **'supervisor'**, bequeathing him the quite large sum of 40 shillings.

Richard then presented a number of extracts from **wills from 1500 to 1637**. They illustrated the abrupt change from Catholic wills to post – Reformation wills. Among examples of bequests we learnt of **John Cobbe, a fisher of St Peter Southgate**, who in 1500 left bequests to **three 'anceres'** [*anchorites or anchoresses*], one in the Whitefriars and two in Conesford, including one at St Julian's, but too late to be Mother Julian; we also saw a map of the seven churches in Conesford where there were anchorholds. (See *Conesford Trail below*). Another interesting bequest in 1548 by Nicholas Lynne of St Julian's was of all his property and his house



[Fisherman with Lift Net from *Flastte Fyshe in the River* by Shirley Harris]

to his servant, appointing him as his sole executor. Thomas Alicock's will of 1493 is of interest because **he was a fuller who owned half of 'Middays', aka Dragon Hall**; he was obviously quite wealthy as he lived in 'St John de Berestrete' but also had property in St Michael de Berestrete, a 'ground' in Hellesdon and a garden in St Peter Parmentergate. That he didn't live in the Dragon Hall property suggests that he used the site *'by the king's river'* for his fulling trade.



We also looked at some wills in **St Peter Southgate** where there was a community almost exclusively comprising **keelmen and fishers**; we saw that one keel was bequeathed by John Lulman to his wife and son: *my keel I give to Mary my wife and to Robert my son to trade together*. His business must have been very successful as he made bequests totalling some £300 to his family. John Stingate's inventory of 1583 valued a keel at £15. Finally we touched on the will of **Lady Katherine Felbrigge**, the aunt of Robert Toppes' second wife, Joan; we got perhaps a glimpse of her personality when she states that, *I do not wish but expressly forbid any of my executors to make a*

Illustration by Ruth Murray

great commotion or vain expenses to the upkeep in general but let them ordain discretley and honestly for my household. (Perhaps we should all forbid our families from 'making a

great commotion or vain expenses’!). Lady Katherine also features in a letter from Margaret Paston to her husband in 1451 about a, perhaps **rather too solemn, dinner party at Toppes’ house** where Lady Felbrigge, Toppes and Joan Toppes were present .

Richard linked several of the wills to information in the three very valuable booklets published by the King Street Research Group: *Flatfysse in the River* and *Keels and Kilns* by Shirley Harris (see front cover above), and *Medieval People of Norwich* by May Wallace.

Postscript

I find the extract below interesting because I thought that wherries only appeared in the 19th century – and what is ‘half a wherry’?!

Inventory of Oliver Phillips Wherryman 1631

One boat one paire of oares and other tackling thereunto belonging	xxiiij s
Half a wherry with half her tackling	iiijL xs
One old wherry with her tackling	xLs
One old skuller with her tackling	xxx s

(Total inventory: £17-2s-8d)

I have both hard (aka paper) copies and digital copies of many wills and inventories of the 15th and 16th centuries, mostly in Conesford. Please contact Richard (richard@dragonhallnorwich.org.uk) if you would like some of either or both of these.

Richard would also welcome (short) contributions from readers on any historical topic, e.g. books, films, photos, etc

December: we met for our now traditional Christmas tapas at the Coach and Horses. Having passed her seven year apprenticeship with flying colours, Valerie orchestrated the complex ordering and paying for the idiosyncratic choices of her colleagues. The lunch was rounded off with toasts to our Chair and to Valerie, plus the now traditional ‘Bumper Quiz’, the winner of which wishes to remain anonymous.

This is the only photo we have of the proceedings.



Bad News for our King Street residents - surely Fake ...?

‘Roger Warde of St Peter Parmentergate deposed that Margaret Dod had said ‘Thomas Wesney did report **‘That there was (sic) but nine good women in the parish of St Peter’**. (Thomas Wesney in the Consistory Court 1523 – quoted in the ‘*The Churches of King St Norwich*’ by Richard Hale [KSRG])

But Cage and Stocks needed

13 May 1668: *Mary, wife of Thos. Ryall and Anne, wife of Jo. Low, both of St. Peter Permentergate, be put in the Cage for **their abusive and rude language** one towards another & they are to stay there for one hour. This punishment afterwards remitted on their husbands becoming surety that they should live orderly for the future.*

14 February 1671: *The stocks in St. Peter Permentergate being much decayed, a rate is to be levied to mend them or to provide new.*

Norwich Textile Trade III

Somewhat surprisingly, there seems to have been quite a large concentration of weavers in Conesford as evidenced by the figures below. This is supported by some figures for 1761 for St Julian, St Peter Southgate and St Etheldreda, where **48 out of 86 people were weavers**, followed by **9 watermen, 4 cordwainers and 3 twisterers** (also in textile trade). The peak is in 1768 and the figures for 1802 might be an indication of the decline in the textile trade in the 19th century.

Worstead Weavers/total tradesmen

	1714	1768	1802
St Etheldreda	5/8	9/20	6/13
St Julian	11/29	18/33	7/34 (incl. 10 watermen)
St Peter Parmentergate	28/49	57/109	20/71
St Peter Southgate	8/15	13/23	5/11
St Michael at Thorn	21/38	-----	-----
TOTALS	73/139	97/185	38/129

(from Conesford Poll Books for Parliamentary elections)

Parson Woodforde's Christmas

December 25, 1794. *It was very cold indeed this morning, and the Snow in many Places very deep, with an E. Wind. Immediately after the Morning Service... I was attacked with an Epileptic Fit and fainted away in my Desk, but thank God! soon recovered... After service was over I walked into Mr Stephen Andrew's House and having warmed myself, I walked home...*

It was Woodforde's custom to give the poor people of the parish sixpence each and on Christmas Day he gave the old folk a splendid dinner of:

A very fine Sirloin of Beef roasted (sic) and plenty of plumb Puddings for dinner and strong beer after... The parlour window was decorated with boughs of holly, and the Parson lit his 'great wax-candle.' The next day saw Woodforde on the mend: *I drank plentifully of Port Wine after dinner, instead of one Glass, drank 7 or 8 Wine Glasses, and it seemed to do me much good...*



Winter Scene by Henrik Avercamp

The cold weather caused problems in the Parsonage kitchen in those days before central heating [*and when I were a lad!, Ed*]:

December 28, 1798. *Frost last night & this Morning and & all the Day intense -- it froze in every*

part of the House even in the Kitchen. Milk and Cream tho' kept in the Kitchen all froze... Even the Meat in our Pantry all froze & also our Bread. *I think the Cold was never more severe in my Life.*

Anchoresses & Hermits

The Conesford Trail, a leaflet published by the Norwich Historic Churches Trust, gives details of seven Conesford churches with anchoresses or hermits as shown on the map below. Clearly Dame Julian was not that unusual – except in writing a book about her visions.

All of the text below is extracted from the leaflet. Presumably a 'recluse' counts as a hermit.

1. **All Saints** – there was an anchorhold here. In 1287/88 the servants of the anchoress were charged that '*they had blocked up the Cockey so that no one could pass there*', possibly for trade of some kind, which was forbidden to anchoresses.
2. **St John Timberhill** – Blomefield, writing in the 1740s, recorded that '*anciently a recluse dwelt in a little cell adjoining the north side of the steeple*'. This had fallen into disuse by the Reformation.
3. **St Bartholomew** – in 1306 an anchoress, Katharine, lived there. Only parts of the tower remain.
4. **St John de Sepulchre** – in Henry III's reign (1216 – 1272) a recluse lived in the churchyard. In 1455 a hermit lived at Ber St Gates. Hermits were not vowed to enclosure and were commissioned to mend roads, collect tolls and clear ditches.
5. **St Julian** – Julian of Norwich whose dates of enclosure are unknown. The first surviving record is in 1394, a bequest by Roger Reed, priest at St Michael Coslaney. The fourth and last reference to her was a bequest in 1416 by the dowager Countess of Suffolk, Isabel Ufford.
6. **St Etheldreda** - Blomefield records that there was an anchorhold '*anciently*' here which continued until the Reformation.
7. **St Edmund the Martyr** – with a long history of anchoresses: 13th century Margaret; 1428 Lady Joan Setman; 1458 Agnes Kyte; 1516 anchoress was left a bequest. Next to the anchorhold was a two storey hospital, Hildebrond's, founded by a merchant of that name in the 1260s. The parish was later united with St Julian's and the church was lost.



Toppesology Corner: Toppes' daughters, stuffs and a raid

Browsing the history of **Carrow Priory**, aka Abbey, by the local historian Walter Rye, I came across a list of 'boarders' – usually the daughters of aristocratic or high status families sent to be given an education of some sort. Among them were Amy Toppe (17 HVI, i.e. 1438) and **Alice Toppe & sister** (10 Edward IV, i.e. 1470/71). They are almost certainly the daughters of Robert Toppes because we have a first hand reference by **their brother, Godfrey Toppes**, to one of them, probably Alice, being a boarder there. This occurs in a deposition or 'witness statement' by him relating to the episode in 1470/71, three or four years after Robert's death, when Robert's house, probably the one just off the marketplace, was raided by Sir James Ratcliffe and several cartloads of 'Norwich stuffs' were removed and taken away, probably to Attleborough. I have dubbed this event the

'Carts of Stuffs Affair'. That Toppes' daughters boarded at Carrow reinforces our perception of Toppes as, partly or largely through his wealth and his second marriage, having climbed into the gentry class.

Following the raid, The Prior of Norwich and Thomas Shanklyn were ordered to take statements from about 20 people, most of them witnesses to the raid, one of them being Godfrey Toppes who states that he didn't see the raid **as he had gone to visit his sister at Carrow Abbey:**

*Godfrey Toppes, the son of the said Robert Toppes, of the age of 37 years and more sworn and examined saith that at that time his mother riding to London left the said Godfrey and others of her children and that one of her daughters being at school at the nunnery of Carrow **the said Godfrey went thither to see his said sister**, in which time Sir James Ratcliffe and the Mayor and Sheriffs had entered the place [i.e. Toppes' house], the gates being fast locked and the said Godfrey having the keys with him, and afterwards the said Godfrey hearing that they had broken the gates and entered the place, came home and there and then found the Mayor and Sheriffs and Sir James Ratcliffe with others viewing the goods and merchandise being within the said place, **which were left for the performing the will of the said Robert Toppes.***

The dates given for the sister in question fit exactly with the date of the raid on Toppes' house (1471/72) and we know that Toppes and Joan had a daughter called Alice and two other daughters – mentioned in his will of 1467. Among the depositions taken following the raid there is also one by **Robert's widow, Joan, nee Knyvett**, who had re-married to Richard Roos. Roos had presumably thereby inherited Robert's house and all the stuffs stored there. Roos was a Lancastrian supporter and had caused some offence to the King, Edward IV, and had gone into sanctuary; the raid seems to have been a punishment for his offence (unknown).

More Toppes/Knyvetts

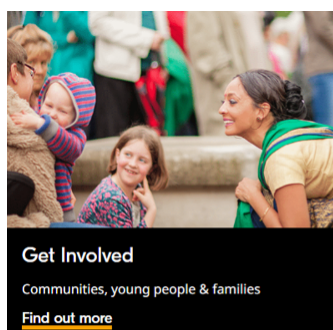
On a recent visit to the Castle (*Re-Born*) I thought that the stand-out piece in the new Gallery of Medieval Life was **the Flemish Triptych from Ashwellthorpe** donated by Christopher Knyvett and his wife Catherine. Christopher was no doubt related to Joan Knyvett, although the family tree is exceedingly complicated. The centre piece depicts the **Seven Sorrows of Mary**; Christopher Knyvett and Catherine are shown in the wings.



Stories Uncovered: A New Project for 2026 is the National Centre for Writing's current Heritage Lottery Fund programme which supports keeping the doors to **Dragon Hall open to**

the public throughout 2026. The project includes **an exciting programme of public events, workshops and open days** all bringing Dragon Hall's rich heritage to life through creative experiences. This will include Heritage Social events and Heritage Talks at Dragon Hall, inviting anyone interested in Norwich's history to drop by to enjoy the building and find out something new. This follows the *Stepping into Dragon Hall* project by the Storymakers last year which produced an exhibition of interpretation materials and a publication entitled 'A Tapestry of Tales'.

Stories Uncovered will see the launch of **a further set of interpretation pieces** in summer 2026. Hannah Garrard, Senior Programme manager at NCW, is leading a new group of 16 Storymaker volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and creative skills. **The heritage focus for this new set of materials will be the social histories of those living in and around Dragon Hall** from 1841 (the year of the first census) to the present day. The group have been given four themes to choose from: domestic, childhood, trade and communities. Identifying themes aims to build a strong social history narrative around the exhibition and interpretation pieces. The project will thus build on the work of DH Volunteers for the **Dragon Hall Block Study** which transcribed the **census records from 1841 to 1911**. (See DHHV website for details).



Community and people are a huge part of [Dragon Hall's](#) story – from the medieval merchant traders to the Victorian slum dwellers, to our many and varied visitors and participants today. It's imperative that [National Centre for Writing](#) is a welcoming space where people can meet and engage in creative activity that is relevant and meaningful to their lives. We aim to do that by creating **opportunities to hear and share each other's stories**, of those who lived in Dragon Hall throughout its history, and from those who will walk through its doors today and tomorrow.

from NCW website

Stories Uncovered also has ambitions to include new oral histories to add to the wonderful, **King Street Community Voices collection**. The 12-week programme will deliver creative workshops by Shannon Clinton-Copeland and a comic-strip artist, David Shenton. The group will be introduced to archival research skills and heritage interpretation through visits to the Norfolk Record Office, Norfolk Heritage Centre and the Norfolk Family History Society, Norwich Castle and the Bridewell Museum.

A special thanks to **Heritage Lottery Fund** for making this public engagement work possible and to the Heritage Volunteers for providing vital research materials to support the Storymakers. The National Centre for Writing looks forward to inviting the Funders and the Heritage Volunteers to the **launch event for the new interpretation materials in Summer 2026**.

Hannah Garrard

Not a Fine City, but an Odd City

(anonymous poet (1792) – who perhaps deserves to remain anonymous!)

Of all the cities I have seen

(And few their numbers have not been)

This Norwich is the oddest; whether

View'd in its parts, or altogether

*“And so, as Tiny Tim said,
'A Merry Christmas to us
all; God bless us, everyone!”*



from Norfolk Chronicle:

December 24th 1831

“The trade for turkeys was dull this Christmas, owing, no doubt, to the depressed state of trade, but principally to the operation of the late Act, which, by throwing a large quantity of game into the market, has proved a losing game to our excellent farmers’ wives, and prevented them obtaining anything like remunerative prices.”

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December 25th 1831

The Mayor of Norwich (Mr. J. H. Yallop), who had sent from the city a swan specially fattened for the Royal table, received from his Majesty, through the Duke of Sussex, a letter thanking him for his “dutiful attention.”

And Planning Ahead for Summer 2026 ?