

**Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers
& Local History Study Group
NEWSLETTER No. 3 September 2020**



Linda Jones



We start with some very sad news: Linda Jones died peacefully on July 14th; she had been ill for a little while. Mary Bradford has sent a condolence letter to her husband, Brian, on behalf of all her friends at Dragon Hall and Mary has also written this tribute to her:

Linda has been a loyal and active member of our Dragon Hall Study Group from its beginning, attending and contributing regularly to our meetings at the Sir Garnett and at the Hall itself. Her lively talks of growing up in the King St bakery, delivered in such a modest and amusing way, will have a special place in the memories of all of us. Her wonderful tales, which stretched back to her grandparents on both sides, were illustrated by the family photo album.

Linda on our visit to Wickhampton church to see the wall paintings

She publicised us among her wider contacts; Andrew is, at least, one who joined us as a result. It was also Linda who organised the very successful visit of Peter Lefebre, the ex parish altar boy, who shared his personal reminiscences, which went back before World War II. Whenever we planned an outside 'trip' Linda was always there, usually accompanied by Brian.

She was generous with her time in supporting other Dragon Hall activities, including HODS and our regular tours. It was always a pleasure to be 'on duty' with her as she was so helpful and such good company. Although she still felt too unsure of herself to give a tour on her own, her welcoming approach and very personal knowledge of the building and the area were much appreciated by our visitors as well as fellow volunteers.

Linda was a lovely lady, positive, kind, supportive, possessing a delightful sense of humour, so modest; I think she was unaware of the value of the contribution she made. We have all lost a dear friend whom we will never forget.

Heather Pfeiffer remembers the last tour of Dragon Hall this year:

*I was lucky enough to have **Linda** to help set up and welcome our one guest that afternoon, a young woman keen to get in to see a building she had long read about. Before we set off Linda had put her at ease with descriptions of the street and the many changes since she lived there.. I wanted Linda to join us as we went from room to room which she did. Without her we wouldn't have had the relaxed and enjoyable chat about the Old Barge, the breweries, the slum clearance, and of course when we got round to it the great man himself, Robert Toppes and his merchant hall. Linda had a unique way of bringing people to understand her own special love of Dragon Hall and its environment and we as volunteers will be forever grateful for her contribution. **She is greatly missed.***

Linda was actually born in the first floor room which abuts on to Dragon Hall, above the entrance to Old Barge Yard - as close as one could get to Dragon Hall without actually being in it. She was **one of our last links** with people born and bred in King Street – and not just King Street but with vivid memories of the Dragon Hall building itself, of The Old Barge pub, of the rectory in the middle section and Swatman's butchers at the north end. **Linda's parents** were the Haydons who ran the bakery immediately adjacent to Dragon Hall which latterly became Bennett's electrical shop and now stands forlornly empty awaiting re-development. Linda recorded her memories for the **King Street Community Voices Project** in 2010 to 2012. They portray vividly an almost vanished way of life and make an important contribution to the record of King Street life up to the 1960s. We trust that you will find them worth reading:

*I was born in 1944 at my father's bakers shop in King Street (later Bennett's Electrical shop). He'd taken over the business from his father who had died in 1928. We had the shop in the front, at the left as you look from St. Julian's Alley, and to the right of that was my father's bake-office which housed two big working surfaces and a coal-fired oven, which never went out. He got up at about 4 every morning, having gone to bed after midnight having put his doughs on to prove and he would bake all morning. Mother would open the shop at 9 o'clock and there would be rolls for all the little business round here, ready at 9 o'clock hot. After lunch and a sleep he would start his **deliveries to customers** all over Norwich, who had been re-housed from King Street to council estates but still wanted his bread.*



*He was famous for Hovis. He had "**Haydon for Hovis**" written above the door because he had won many prizes from the Hovis Flour people. He made all shapes and sizes of loaf and rolls. He got the idea in the early 50s to diversify into having filled rolls - which really were the first - and all the businesses around here, Plumstead's in particular, used to come and order in the mornings and he would have them ready for lunchtime. At Christmas he also used to cook people's turkeys etc. for them, and their cakes. I used to go in the van with him at Easter, with the hot cross buns, which I'd helped bag up.*

Our living accommodation downstairs was extremely small - one room. Mother did not have a kitchen or an oven - she did all her baking in the bakery oven and had a little ring for saucepans in a hearth and a curtained-off sink for washing up. The yard at the back had an outside toilet and eventually a garage for his van and our small Austin 7 car. They never actually owned the building.

My grandparents kept the fish shop next door to us: Arthur and Annie Barber - wet fish and a fried fish & chip shop - they were 125A and we were 125. My mother had moved to the fish shop when she was 5 and my father was 8 years old and living in the bakery.

*I did not go to the schools in King Street - my father had a low opinion of Horns Lane and sent me to Lonsdale - but I played hopscotch, skipping etc. with a lot of the children in Sherbourne Place, which was a safe little area with no through traffic. **Upstairs in No. 125** was a beautiful area - two very big bedrooms, small boxroom and a small bathroom (still an outside toilet!) So I had a huge bedroom for myself with lots of room to play when friends came round.*

*Downstairs there was one big long running beam through the living room, but not upstairs although the outside is timber framed. **Our ovens were over 300 years old.** One side of our living room wall was the exterior of the oven so it was like central heating in winter but a very hot living area in summer.*

Sundays were quiet. My father did not work on Sundays and we had an outing in the car most Sunday afternoons I used to go to St. Peter Parmentergate Church when **Fr. Sear** was here and kept that connection after we had moved. I also belonged to a little guild called St. Julian's Guild for Girls, run by the nuns. **Sister Kathleen Paul**, who was very formidable, a tall gaunt woman in her black nun's habit, and we had fun, we'd have a little prayer and hymn and then play games. We met in the little parish hall in St. Julian's Alley.

I came into the pub as a child to play in the upstairs part and also the rectory when Fr. Sear was here - Brian and I had our little prep talk there before getting married. Fr. Sear was a lovely man. I enjoyed my time at St. Peters. It was extremely high Anglican. We used to go up and ring the Angelus with the nuns. Fr. Sear married us in St. Peter's and my daughter was christened in St. Julian's. My parents had been married there, in the old church in 1938.

We used to still have **the horse-pulled brewery dray** come down King Street and they rolled the barrels down into the cellar of The Old Barge. As a child I remember lots of little shops; Aldous on the corner, where we got our greengroceries; Hales the ships chandler, Bircham's the butchers, Swatman's butchers on the corner of St. Anne's Lane, a chemist on the corner of Rose Lane. Swatman's had the old scrubbed wooden counter, sawdust on the floor, and **Mrs. Swatman**, who was a very demure tiny little lady, used to sit in a little wood and glass office structure at the end; he would give you the meat with the price written on and you would go to her to pay. When the Swatmans' daughter got married he wanted to make her an eiderdown from all these duck and goose feathers he had saved, and they had to be cured first, so my father put them in the bread oven overnight.

My father sold groceries as well as bread - cold meats, cheese, tinned stuff. Nothing was pre-wrapped. Cakes in the window, boxes of flour and sugar, cheese in a slab, biscuits in a big tin to be weighed out and bagged. There were a couple of seats. People would bring in a little book with their order for the week and Mum would box everything up. And men would come into the shop from working on the river. There was one my father called the wherryman, who used to come in and tell stories.

My childhood playmate was Steven Hall, whose father was the **landlord of The Old Barge (and a pre-war Norwich City goalie)**. We used to play behind the yard where the cottages had been pulled down or bombed. One of the few things that made my father angry was finding me at closing time hanging out of my window talking to people coming out of the pub; they were often rather drunk, sometimes shouting or fighting. The women used to come to get their husbands home, shouting at them. My grandfather liked a drink and I can remember grandmother coming up, "Arthur! Will you come home!". We used to still have the horse-pulled brewery dray come down King Street and they rolled the barrels down into the cellar of **The Old Barge**.

You can see Linda talking about her memories in **the film** that some of us made for King Street Community Voices, which is now on our website; the voice-over is by David Vince:

<https://www.dragonhallnorwich.org.uk/pages/films.html>

Carrow Abbey

After weeks of lockdown and only local walks I have got used to enjoying reflections on visits made to historic places and sites many months ago. I have dug out leaflets and gone through

material online and in books to refresh my memory. **Heritage Open Days** – would they go ahead this year? I checked today (Aug 25th). Their 2020 site is up and running with a pretty good offering including two opportunities to visit **St Peter Parmentergate: on 12th and 20th September** between 10.0 and 2.0 p.m. We will have a presentation called '**Dragon Hall throughout the Ages - a digital tour**', available **from 11 September**. This has been compiled by NCW using material from our website and was the best we could do, given that the building is closed. There are no chances to go to **Carrow Abbey** this year but fortunately in September 2018 I got my chance. I had booked through HODs in late August before I lost the sight of one eye as a result of Giant Cell Arteritis. In spite of feeling a bit ropey I had to go and it was well worth it.

Unilever were still in production on the site then and when we finally got through security we gathered in the former prioress's house. This was completed not long before the Dissolution in 1538. Henry V¹¹ sold it to Sir John Shelton an uncle in law to Anne Boleyn and over the years it was remodelled as a fine dwelling especially by the Colman family when mustard making was moved to Carrow from Stoke Holy Cross in 1854. Actually Carrow was from its foundation in 1146 not an Abbey but a priory for about a dozen Benedictine nuns founded on royal land 'in the fields of Norwich', that is from Bracondale down to the river and as far as the village of Carrow on the south east approach to Norwich along the Wensum. Many were from better off families who had a regular income of their own and other women would come to reside alongside them as widows or in old age.



An illustration from the 13th century Carrow Psalter

The other Benedictine priory was that attached to the cathedral and the two were often locked in disputes about land and rights. Carrow nuns attracted sufficient wealth for their foundation to build a magnificent church, a landmark to those approaching the city before they reached the Conesford gate. Dedicated to St Mary it was a place of worship for the nuns, their guests and fellow residents and servants as well as local people and visitors. It was a big local employer of laundresses, cooks, maids, millwrights, gardeners, coopers, smiths, masons, carpenters, and agricultural workers and when improvements were being made to the buildings, of the many craftsmen employed on glazing new windows, embellishing interiors and providing essential items for the liturgy. Nearby the riverside was the workplace of boatbuilders, fishermen, and reeders and there were daily deliveries to the abbey by river from the coast as there were passing boats on their way to the likes of Toppes yard not more than a mile up river.

You can still walk the outline of the walls of the church but all the priory buildings must have been raided for valuable building materials after the Dissolution so that today only stone bases of pillars and walls remain. In the chapter on the Religious Houses in 'Medieval Norwich' we find numerous references to those who in their wills made donations to the priory. The well to do of the city with personal connections to the priory requested burial there. There was Elizabeth Yaxley for example who in 1529 left 66s 8p to pay for her burial before the image of the Virgin at the high altar end of the church. Donations came from individuals as well as other less conventional income streams. In 1391 the pope offered indulgences for sale to those who would contribute to the upkeep of St Mary's church - a slip of paper from which the purchaser gained remission from penance for 4 years and 160 days! As the years passed the nuns acquired a regular rental income and were clever in their use of land so that their debts were not significant when inspectors came round.

For Conesford Street residents the presence of this important priory just down the road (or river depending on your mode of transport) could not be ignored. It influenced the spiritual life of its neighbouring community. Every year from 1385 the guild of spurriers and saddlers processed from the cathedral in their liveries from the cathedral to the nunnery where they heard mass, made offerings and presented heavy candles to illuminate the high altar. **St Julian's church**, appropriated to the priory, shared the spirituality of its anchoress Julian with its mother church at Carrow. I like to imagine that Margery Kempe the mystic from Kings Lynn stayed with the nuns when she came to visit Julian and share her wisdom.

A visit to Carrow is a great opportunity for those interested in all things Toppes and Conesford! I have since looked for 15th century manuscripts and documents on line. You can easily track down images from one of 3 Carrow Psalters, no doubt donated by wealthy patrons. The one I liked particularly shows 2 images of Jonah, one where he is pushed overboard and the second where he is in the jaws of the whale. I didn't need to explore the Colman legacy as we were given a very good sheet about their time at Carrow. I wonder when the next stage of development will start now Unilever have gone. (I think?) We can be assured that Carrow priory cannot be buried under buildings like the site of the Austin Friars next to Dragon Hall.

Online resources:

- Walter Rye: 'Carrow Abbey' - available in Hathi Trust digital library from Columbia uni library.
- www.british-history.ac.uk: *Houses of Benedictine nuns: 'The Priory of Carrow'*.
- ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson: *Medieval Norwich*

Heather Pfeiffer

Heritage Open Days 2020: September 11th to 20th

As mentioned above the full programme is now available at <https://norfolkheritageopendays.co.uk/>

Most of the events are podcasts or virtual tours, including one of Dragon Hall, and even a 'virtual' trip on a wherry! But there are a few self-guided walks; 'open doors' visits, including the Messianic Synagogue in Essex St.; talks; a walking tour; and open gardens, including the Bishop's Garden. Other highlights include an exhibition in The Forum of photos of Norwich in the 50's and 60's.

The Norfolk Record Office also have some on line events: of special interest to us is a talk about the two breweries in King St: Youngs, Crawshay, Youngs and Morgans:

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/WhctKJVzdNxsBqVSQtWBnFqrNLQhDXZcSBHLjqxLGCWpqhbKPmLXJBrMKjFJCdqNgnSFFjQ>

Interesting websites No.3: The Great Blow

On 24th April 1648 a rioting crowd unwittingly unleashed **the largest explosion in 17th century England** – much larger than the November 5th explosion would have been – detonating 98 barrels of gunpowder in the County Committee's house on the site of today's Bethel Hospital. An excellent

account of the affair can be seen in a blog post by the Norfolk Record Society which published a transcription of all the documents about it in 2018:

https://norfolkrecordsociety.org.uk/the-civil-war-comes-to-norwich/?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Blog-Post_Great_Blow

News from Norwich Castle

Museums Pass holders can now visit not just Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and Time and Tide Museum, but **from 24 August, you can visit Norwich Castle** too. Tickets must be booked in advance as numbers are limited.

The ambitious £13.5m National Lottery Heritage Fund supported **project on the Keep** has begun. It will recreate the Keep's original 12th century lay-out and make all five levels fully accessible for the first time. The plans include development of a new medieval gallery in partnership with the British Museum to showcase national medieval treasures alongside Norfolk's own internationally signification collections - and **a new café** (hurray!).

News from Dragon Hall and the NCW

Amanda has given us the following update:

No events are taking place at Dragon Hall for the foreseeable future – apart from a ceremony-only socially distanced wedding. We think it will be the new year before we are comfortable planning anything to happen here, and that's all dependant on the next few months/second wave etc.

Unfortunately we have been dealing with an underground leak in the south end of the Glass Gallery by the door to the Screens Passage. This has escalated quite considerably in the last couple of weeks. We think we may have identified the source as some old lead plumbing that hasn't been capped off properly from the front of King Street, under the Old Barge Room and through to the Gallery area.

The NCW's festival of crime writing, 'Noirwich' is going ahead full steam on line from 10th to 13th September. See details at <https://noirwich.co.uk/>

Local Films 3: Read's flour mill, King St 1993

This is a short film with a few shots from the river and interior shots of the working mill. The location was the site of St Olaf's Chapel, a pre- Norman dedication. The mill started life as **Albion Mill**, built in 1837 as a yarn spinning mill, very much at the tail end of Norwich's attempt to compete with the textile industry in the north. It was then converted to make confectionery and in 1932 became Read's flour mill. The Read business closed in 1993, shortly after the film was made. The mill has now been converted into apartments.

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-reads-flour-mill-1993-online>

Contributions please

Please consider writing a short item for our November edition. We suggest a theme of **'My Favourite Norwich Building or place'** – or on any local history topic.- or a few quiz questions for the next edition? It can be very short. Please send to richardmatthew24@gmail.com.