

**Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers
& Local History Study Group**
NEWSLETTER No. 7 November 2021



Study Group: Visit to the Rosary Cemetery - October 18th

Jim Marriage is our most experienced guide at Dragon Hall and he is also a Friend of the Rosary Cemetery. The Study Group by chance had chosen a perfect Autumn morning of misty sunshine for a very special tour led by Jim round the Rosary. The Friends have produced a leaflet entitled Military Connections that will take the reader to tombs and memorials to those who died in or as a result of conflicts, mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries or in the air raid attacks on Norwich.



The walk was all the more atmospheric because beyond the cleared pathways the vegetation obscured many burial places. Newer memorials provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission were easier to view and many of them recognized the tragic loss of young lives. There were the Gale brothers aged 26 and 21 who were both killed in 1918. The Hubbard memorial is to a young man who served in the Norfolk Regiment and died in 1919 having been wounded in France in 1915. Each of the many memorials here has a hidden story of tragic loss and one was left wanting to know more about these men whose names are now recorded so touchingly in this beautiful place.

Jim also took us to some of the memorials to other prosperous Norwich families and we finished at the mausoleum of Emanuel Cooper. Jim told us that he was a Norwich eye surgeon whose tomb is on the spot where after his retirement he loved to sit and look at the view over Norwich. His two children and their mother are also buried here at his request. There are many stories to tell and Jim has agreed to follow up on more of our thoughts and questions about the Rosary at our next Study Group meeting on 15 November. If you have not yet been to the Rosary it is highly recommended and I shall make my leaflet available to anyone who would like it. Thank you Jim!

Heather Pfeiffer

Tours

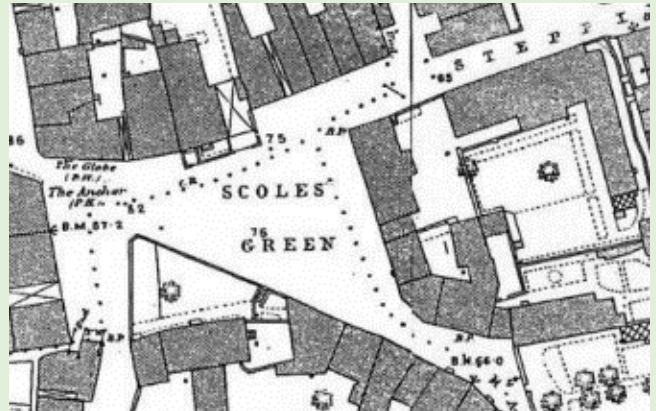
Although we were disappointed that we could not run any tours during the Heritage Open Days period, two successful tours have now taken place. It was good to welcome the Crimean War Society to Dragon Hall on September 23rd as their original booking was for Spring 2020! They were erudite and appreciative visitors.

We also did a trial run of one of our regular open tours on October 18th which was restricted to ten participants and had to be booked on the NCW site. It was a sellout which augers well for the next one on November 15th. **We do need more potential guides to join our 'team'** once our tours get back to normal, particularly as it will be desirable to restrict the size of groups touring the building for the foreseeable future. If you are interested in this enjoyable and rewarding activity please contact us.

'In the Shadow of the Castle'

This is the title of a fascinating account sent to me by John Stevens; it's about his early life in Scoles Green between 1953 and 1957. **I had no idea where Scoles Green was but in fact it was just at the top of Stepping Lane** and John's house was exactly where Richard Nash Cars showroom now is. It still has its name on a wall commemorating it. (John knew of our existence through our website and we do get the occasional contact or query from people who have seen it.)

John's family lived in a *'very decrepit Georgian building the perfect home for a small boy with a vivid imagination'*. The house features in George Plunkett's *'Disappearing Norwich'* of 1987 and was of four storeys, built into the side of the hill, with views across the Wensum Valley to Thorpe St Andrew and Mousehold Heath. The house still had working gas lights and *'the wind howled on occasion through the ancient floorboards'*. It belonged to the Great Hospital and the rent was two and six per week! There was no hot water supply and hot water for baths was carried from the kitchen in buckets upstairs to the bathroom.



John seems to have almost perfect recall of the house and its surroundings and paints a vivid picture of his life roaming the area between Ber Street and King Street, also of a vanished world and lifestyle. The area still had heaps and craters dating from the Norwich Blitz of 1942: *'.... for us it was like one big adventure playground with rampant plant growth'*. He describes how



an early interest in archaeology was stimulated: *'in an age before Time Team I taught myself to dig a trench and search for artefacts'*. He describes the live market which was held on Saturdays just below the Castle: *'I loved to go round the pens looking at the different breeds. The sheep were packed so tight that the sheepdog would sometimes simply run across their backs.'* He also makes extensive use of local maps and directories and describes his schooling at Horns Lane School: *'I was never in a class of less than 50 ... the level of violence that we experienced would astonish most modern parents and teachers firmer justice included being hit with rulers, sticks and gym shoes'..... 'the only implements available were pen and ink'. 'Dragon Hall has been preserved ... in my day no one recognized it for what it was'.*

He concludes this exemplary memoir and contribution to local history: *'I can only wonder at how lucky I was to be brought up in a such a place. History was all around, a part of everyday life'*. These positive sentiments echo almost exactly those expressed by the people who were interviewed for the King Street Community Voices Project – itself an exemplary piece of social history.

We are most grateful to John for sending us his memoir and I would urge you to read some or all of it on our website (dragonhallnorwich.org.uk), on the new Archive page: hover over the Local History tab. At the same time you could dip into the transcriptions of the King Street Community Voices interviews. We hope to add more items to the Archive in due course.

We hope to meet John when he visits from York where he is active in the Clements Hall Local History Group. It would be interesting to learn more of their activities and researches.

Study Group

Our Dragon Hall Study Group held its first 'in person' meeting since COVID on Monday August 2nd. We met in the Great Hall where we were able to open windows and sit well apart from each other. **It was really lovely to be back. Adrian showed us his film, 'The History of Dragon Hall'** which served as an excellent refresher for everyone and especially for those who are guides. We once again admired Adrian's ability to produce such a professional presentation.

It is good to report that inspired by the film Angela Coles and our very new member, Rachel Hobson, have agreed to become guides. Thank you both, we need you - and anyone else who might like to give it a go! Some of us then did a walk around the building to familiarise ourselves with it again.

At our next meeting on September 15th (usual 3rd Monday morning of each month), Susan shared her fascinating research on **the establishment of the Norfolk Lunatic Asylum at Thorpe St Andrew's in 1814** and the routine there under its first Master and Mistress, Thomas and Sarah Caryl (Susan's direct ancestors!). Adrian then told us about the hospital it became and particularly the connection with Polish servicemen during and after World War 11.

The October meeting was at the Rosary Cemetery and is featured elsewhere in the Newsletter. **Our next meeting is scheduled for Monday 15th November at 10.30 am at Dragon Hall. The programme is still to be finalised and all are welcome to join us.**

Mary Bradford

Rummaging in the Norfolk Record Office on line catalogue: Coroner's Inquests

William Althorp, age 5

24 June 1818, The Old Barge, St Julian

Being on the deck of a wherry in the River Waveney at Langley Short Reach, when a gust of wind forced the sail against his breast, and he was thrown overboard and drowned.

Verdict: Accident

Jacob Livock, age 5

18 September 1818, The Old Barge, St Julian in King Street

*He went down to the Old Barge Staithe to catch some fish, and fell into the river, and that at the time there was not any person on the spot. Found drowned in the River Wensum near **the Old Barge Staithe.***

Verdict: Accidentally drowned.

Jeremiah Walker, age 7

9 October 1811 [10 October 1811 on dorse], The Old Barge, St Julian

He was attempting to go ashore from the wherry on which he had been returning from Yarmouth via another wherry lying along side when he accidentally slipped between the two and was drowned in that part of the river known as Coldham Reach.

Verdict: Accidental death.

I've discovered that for a few topics in the NRO on line catalogue **there are some very useful summaries** which avoids the need to go to the NRO and dig out the relevant documents. One example is the Coroner's Inquests and I give some extracts above and below for our 'patch'. Inquests were often held in pubs – four of them being held in The Old Barge. Four of the deaths were of children, two of them on wherries; and one, little Jacob Livock, **actually on Old Barge Staithe**, presumably at the end of Old Barge Yard. Interestingly, Samuel Wickham was working on a vessel called 'The Old Barge' – was it a wherry?

John Dent, infant age 2

20 June 1800, St Peter Parmentergate

Whilst playing in the street near The Prince of Wales Public House he was accidentally run over by a brewer's dray, property of Messrs Tompsons beer brewers, driven by Samuel Norton, labourer and died instantly.

Verdict: Accidental death.

Samuel Wickham of St Julian, age 47

11 November 1818, The Old Barge (in King Street), St Julian

*Servant to Mr William Hilling, master of a vessel **called the Old Barge**, employed on the Rivers Wensum and Yare to convey goods and passengers from Norwich to Yarmouth. He was sitting on the bulkhead of the Old Barge travelling from Yarmouth to Norwich when he was suddenly seized with a fit and fell overboard a mile and a half from Hartley Cross. His body was not recovered until the following day, close to where he fell overboard.*

Verdict: Fell overboard with a fit

RJM

Outreach

On a recent 'Desert Island Discs' broadcast the Harvard-based American political philosopher Michael Sandel said that, when he gives a lecture, he knows immediately if he has the attention of his audience by the number of coughs, amount of paper-rustling or the degree of gazing-off-into-the distance by his students. When Covid strikes and all face-to-face activity is brought to a screeching halt, that ability to feel how your students are engaging is not discernible.

Sandel concurred that Zoom technology has been a godsend but when it comes to giving talks on 'The History of Dragon Hall' or other esoteric topics, not being able to see the colour of your listeners' eyes takes a lot of the fun out of talking to community or local history groups. It's the same feeling that a stand-up comedian has with no one else in the night-club. Both Richard Matthew and I have been obliged to give online presentations over the last eighteen months because all village halls and other venues were sealed-shut.

However we both zoomed-off on the ether for a number of talks and presentations. Richard entertained the ladies of two Norfolk WI groups (in the best possible taste of course) with online talks on Robert Toppes and Dragon Hall followed by a trip to Kent without even leaving his house with a talk on DH to a U3A group down there. We've both learned how to pre-record our talks which allows you to use a script and cram in a lot more detail. Using that process, he showed his video on the Guildhall to the Norwich Society and the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group.

Meanwhile I was invited to give an online presentation on Dragon Hall to Wymondham Heritage Society and other invitations for my Landscape History talks came from Chet Valley Probus Club, Carleton Rode, Aylsham and Garboldisham history groups ('Finding the medieval city in Norwich's modern layout', 'Industrial activity in 19th century Norfolk' and 'Reading and analysing the landscape history of your area').

In recent weeks community groups have been opening-up again and Richard got back into the swing of things at the end of October courtesy of an invitation from the Wensum Valley Probus Club to spill the beans on his old chum Robert Toppes. And, just like the inveterate stand-up performer that he is, Richard had them laughing* in the aisles! (**and singing and dancing!* ed.).

Adrian O'dell

Dragon Hall 'archive'?

Some of us have been giving thought to the preservation of all the documents and photos that we have which are related to Dragon Hall that various people, mostly volunteers, have produced over the last fifty years or so, e.g. transcriptions of original documents, such as Robert Toppes' will of 1467. We think that this record of all the research, fund-raising, education, etc, etc, which has been done over the years should be preserved. Our concern is that, whether such records are in digital form, i.e. sitting on someone's computer, or in hard copies scattered in various folders who knows where, we want to ensure that they will be available to future volunteers and, if possible, to the wider public generally.

Adrian O'dell is in touch with the Norfolk Record Office about having them professionally archived but it seems impossible to do this without some funding which is being pursued. Hard copies of most of the documents produced for Volunteers in recent years – many of them on our website – will shortly be deposited in the Local Studies section of the Millenium Library but these are only a small proportion of the total. This topic will require a lot of thought and discussion. Please contribute any thoughts you have about this or any knowledge of how other similar organisations have tackled this problem.

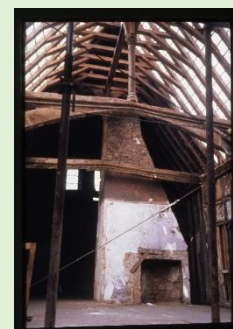
Digging into the 'Archive': some examples of photos



1980's staircase from Old Barge Room to the Great Hall



1980's: view from the Screens Passage into the Old Barge Room



Yes, there really were fireplaces and chimneys in the Great Hall!

‘Remember, remember

From the Minutes of The Mayor’s Court 4 November 1719:

Gunpowder. Tomorrow being the anniversary of Gunpowder Plot Ordered that the Cannoner have his usual Allowance of 10 pound of Gunpowder for firing the 5 Brass Gunns, That there be ringing of Bells throughout the City & that the Day be observed with the usuall Solemnity.

On the net: some websites worth looking at

Vindolanda – the Roman fort on Hadrian’s Wall

You can see an on line exhibition of artefacts at:

<https://www.vindolanda.com/Listing/Category/digging-up-memories>

There are also two complementary on line lectures remaining. They are free but donations are encouraged: <https://www.vindolanda.com/lectures>

Norfolk Record Office posts

The NRO has regular excellent posts on a huge variety of local topics, the latest being on **astrologists** who flourished in Great Yarmouth in the 17th century:

<https://norfolkrecordofficeblog.org/2021/11/06/great-yarmouths-early-modern-astrology/>

I was somewhat surprised to read the first half of the 17th century being described as a ‘golden age for astrologers’. I’d assumed astrology would be regarded with suspicion by the Puritans, although Mark Prynne was tried twice for witchcraft and Miles Corbet MP and regicide was very suspicious of astrology.

All the previous posts can be found by scrolling down the right hand side of the NRO page. They include ‘Folk Medicine in 1920s East Anglia’, ‘The Norfolk Broads revealed as man-made features: the discoveries of Dr Joyce M. Lambert’ and ‘A Norwich girl’s experience of the Baedeker Raids’.

The National Archives

TNA has an interesting mix of on line talks and webinars (seminars on the web to me and you). They include ‘The wedding of the century: Arthur and Katherine (1501)’ on Nov 12th; ‘Webinar: Researching your family history’ on November 13th and ‘All the Kings’ Fools: Disability and the Tudors’ on November 17th. They are free but donations are suggested: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/events/>

The History Interpreter

These talks include local, social and family history and cost £3 each:

<https://thehistoryinterpreter.wordpress.com/meet-the-history-interpreter-a-series-of-online-talks/>

HP/MB/RJM