



# **SPECIAL EDITION**

**Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers  
& Local History Study Group**

**NEWSLETTER No.16 Summer 2024**



**This is a special edition all about .....**

***'Stepping into Dragon Hall'*** - because the project has recently made great strides and we thought that you should know about what has been achieved and learn about some **activities planned for this summer**, particularly for families.

We have used extracts from their **colourful and imaginative publications** to convey the range of their activities.

In many ways they have 'wound back the clock' to **the original visions** of 'The Old Barge Steering Committee' and the Trust from the 1980s onward of Dragon Hall as a 'heritage centre', open to the public at all times – the main addition to that vision being the focus and skills of the National Centre for Writing and of the Project staff and participants.

This prompts the thought that without the sterling work and enthusiasm of the original 'movers and shakers', led by Chris Barringer, there would be no Dragon Hall as we know it today - and no NCW using it so creatively! **See the last page for some examples of the original vision for the Hall as a heritage centre.**



*Interpretation board in the Welcome Room, aka Swatman's butcher's shop*

## **About the Project 1**

**The Stepping Into Dragon Hall project** has enabled the National Centre for Writing (NCW) to **create new experiences** for those visiting and engaging with Dragon Hall as both a heritage space and a contemporary literature house. Over the past eight months they have: created **new interpretation boards** and a **venue map** to allow self-guided visits to Dragon Hall; introduced **new 'drop-in' visitor hours** from 10am-3pm on Sunday to Wednesday each week; **recruited a team of volunteers** to support public access to the building; **updated the commercial kitchen** to be used also as a community kitchen and **created a Welcome Room** which will soon operate as a box office and shop.



*Interpretation boards for self – guiding tours*

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**Combining the story of Dragon Hall - using material from the DHHV website - with NCW's focus on creative writing, catering for all age groups, including textile work .....**

## Older people's projects

**Breathing Fire into Time**

**Cloth of Kindness, Stitch Your Stories**

Over four sessions, nine participants worked with Cloth of Kindness Founders Sally -Anne Lomas and Gill Perks to explore their own memories, those of Dragon Hall and the wider King Street area. A washing line of stitched garments was exhibited in The Gallery over four days in June 2024.

**Rose Feather, Personal Histories**

**Breathing Fire into Time newspaper**

Over 5 sessions, 10 participants worked with artist Rose Feather to create a newspaper in response to the varied history of Dragon Hall.

Many of the participants have used their own lived experience in their writing but through the lens of Dragon Hall and its history.

**The Year of 1427**

The moon shone silver as Robert Toppes walked by the River Wensum on his way to his merchant's hall. His head was full of prices, of cloth, of bargaining. It had been another busy day and he was glad he would soon be in his bed. The wind shivered in the riverside trees and as Robert looked he saw a shape emerging from the ripples on the water's surface.

I have prote and the mon who fished tl waters. I pro John Page w when the mo now I will safi merchants ha prosper for all

Robert stared in wonder as the dragon lifted clear of the water.

**The Swatman Family - 1940s**

Arthur and Hilda Swatman

## About the Project 2: Workshops & Activity Sessions

Alongside this activity, the National Centre for Writing have **expanded their creative activity programme**, delivering creative writing and heritage learning **workshops and drop-in activity sessions for families, children and young people, Refugees and Asylum Seekers and older residents**. Throughout the work and publications created by these groups you will see woven **stories, real and imaginary, inspired by the Dragon Hall trading complex**, its inhabitants, the dragon, the processing of fish, the nearby church of St Julian, archaeological excavations, pubs and many other themes. All of these have been **greatly informed by the previous research of the Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers**. It has been wonderful to see the **creativity and enthusiasm** with which participants and visitors have engaged with Dragon Hall and its history, from windows full of **decorated eggs** by children taking part in the Dragon Egg Easter trail to **creative writing and illustrations** inspired by the lived experiences and imaginations of older residents and children.

**Family involvement: story telling, shawls, refugees, drama .....**

## Family days x 5

### TUES 20 FEB 10AM-1PM

Medieval storytelling with Storyteller and Author Dave Tonge. Crafts and family friendly show arounds.

### TUES 09 APRIL 1PM-3PM

Norwich Shawls workshop with the Costume & Textile Association

**Sunday 14 April 10AM-3PM**  
Norfolk Makers Festival family day

### Sunday 2 June 10AM-3PM

Family day

### WEDS 21 FEB, 11AM-2PM

**Family day for Refugee and Asylum Seeker families**

Drama with Hilary Thomson

**Coming up:** 5 x family days on Sun 14 July and Monday 22 & 29 July and 5 & 12 August 10am-3pm.

5 x drop-in family days for refugee and asylum seekers on Tuesdays 23 & 30 July, 6, 13 & 20 August.

### TUES 02 APRIL

**This is Our Home: Creative Play in Dragon Hall for Under 5s with Rose Feather**

Storytelling, songs and crafts inspired by the people that once lived in Dragon Hall.

31 children and adults.



Home-Educated young learners, 11–13 year olds, and Norwich City College students ..... even mindfulness ....

## Young people's projects



© Wayward Adventurers Guild

### What's the story in Dragon Hall? Picture book.

Over four sessions, eleven Home-Educated young learners aged 8-13 worked with artist Rose Feather to create a Choose Your Own Adventure book of Dragon Hall.

**38 children and adults attended a celebration event on Tues 4<sup>th</sup> June.**

### Wayward Adventurers Guild

#### Quest for the Missing Dragons

Over three sessions, nine young people, aged 11-13 worked with Wayward Adventurers Guild to create a 'Quest for the Missing Dragons' trail which will be available for families to complete over the summer holidays.

### Mindful ways to approach Dragon Hall

Over four sessions, young people with SEND from City College Norwich worked with NCW and writer Avani Shah to learn about the history of Dragon Hall and interpret this creatively.

## Volunteers and Story Makers

New NCW volunteer team in place since April.

A second cohort of volunteers were trained on Tues 18<sup>th</sup> June.

Story Makers Project Volunteers.

Over 10 sessions between Feb – April 2024, volunteers have researched the history of Dragon Hall with training from Norfolk Record Office, Norfolk Museums Service, Norfolk Heritage Centre and in how to collect oral histories.

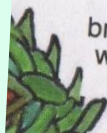
The Story Makers' work will be presented as a digital exhibition from 18 August.

**New Volunteers, story makers and new research ...**

**Hello, my name is Dragon .....**

Hello, my name is Dragon and I have lived in this place for over 500 years. At first I shared my home with my 13 brothers and sisters but now I'm the only one left. Sometimes I feel a bit lonely, but throughout my long life I have witnessed so much. Many thousands of people have lived and visited here; there are always interesting things going on and the building has changed a lot.

When I was a young dragon my home was such a busy place with merchants selling their goods which were brought up the river in boats from other countries.. There was so much to see but I particularly liked looking at the fine woven cloth and smelling the spices.



## About the Project 3: Story Makers

The **Story Makers** have just submitted their final pieces of heritage interpretation as part of the Stepping into Dragon Hall project and they will be showcased for **display from 18th August**. The group have worked together over 12 weeks to explore different ways of approaching and **retelling the stories relating to Dragon Hall**, including its contemporary designation as a literature house. All pieces are distinct in their storytelling and formats including a **folk song, film, short stories, poetry and even a pop-up book**. The themes they have chosen to interpret include the **tenement housing clearance of the 1930s** to the building materials.

**School visits,  
Community Picture  
Book, and Norfolk  
Makers Festival .....**

### Other activity



#### Schools

7 x school visits (academic years 3-8) exploring the history of Dragon Hall and Norwich as a City of Literature. Working with writer Avani Shah in June and July 2024.



#### Norfolk & Norwich Festival

**Build a Community Picture Book**  
**Four family workshops on Sat 25 May – Sun 26 May**

Families created a page for a community book inspired by Dragon Hall and the people who have lived and worked here.



**NORFOLK  
MAKERS  
FESTIVAL**  
13-21 Apr 2024

Talk on the history of Dragon Hall by Richard Matthew on Weds 17 April and a day of outreach craft activities at The Forum on Monday 15 April.

## A vision for the space

Ongoing interpretation and resource creation. Created by community groups, Story Makers, communications team and Step Into Dragon Hall project team.

Refit of welcome room as a shop front and box office, currently in development!

Commercial kitchen has been updated to be used also as a community kitchen.

Bookable writers' space on a Thursday and Friday, starting end of July.



**'The Butcher's  
Shop Re-born'? ....  
aka The Welcome  
Room ... plus  
kitchen re-fit ....**

## A choose-your-own-adventure book, written and illustrated by artists and authors aged 8-13

Hello, Father Sear .....



When my daughter Cassie was 8 or 9 years old (she is 30 this year) she visited Dragon Hall with the school or Brownies. Unknown to me whilst she was shown around, one of the things that was pointed out to her was the treated woodworm in the beams in the Great Hall.

She came home telling me excitedly about her day. Then went up to her bedroom, and a few minutes later came rushing downstairs to tell me she had woodworm!

We have lovely old wooden floors in some rooms: hers were varnished with a rug. I went to look and sure enough she was right - it was in the floorboards. This resulted in her bedroom and the hallway floors needing to be replaced. In the process of the survey we also discovered that the house needed an electrical rewire!

**THIS SUMMER**  
Family Activity,  
Guided Tours,  
Story Makers  
Exhibition ..

### Family Activity Days

SUN 2 JUNE, SUN 14 JULY, MON  
5 AUGUST, 10AM-3PM, FREE

Drop into Dragon Hall and discover 600 years of fascinating stories! Learn about the building and its different uses over time, and take part in storytelling, craft activities and games for all ages. No booking required.

### Guided Heritage Tours

MON 17 JUNE, MON 15 JULY, MON  
19 AUGUST, MON 16 SEPTEMBER,

£5 SUGGESTED DONATION

Take a guided tour of Dragon Hall and

### All creatures of legends

"Hello Father Sear," said Dragon, "Having a nice day?"  
Father Sear said, "Yes I am."

"Look," continued Father Sear, "There is a hole in this wall... and if you put in a magic stone, you find all the lost dragons. It's like a portal to another world."

"Wow!" said Dragon. "And if I put this stone in this little crack?" Smoke started to billow from the crack, and a whole family of elves appeared.

"Elves!" shouted Father Sear, "You have discovered a new portal Dragon!"

The elves jumped forward with their cannons. "We don't come in peace!" Suddenly, it was elves VS dragons!

"But hold on!" said Dragon. "We are both creatures of legends aren't we?"

"Yes... so?" said the elves.

"So why are we fighting then?!" asked Dragon.

"Okay, okay you have made your point," said the elves and they lowered their cannons. "What is this place anyway?"

"It's called Dragon Hall - we'll show you around!" laughed Dragon.

"Phew," said Father Sear.

learn more about its architectural and social history from an experienced volunteer guide. Please book in advance as spaces are limited.

### Story Makers: A Digital Exhibition

LATE SUMMER, 10AM-3PM, FREE, DROP IN

We have been working with local community groups to create personal responses to Dragon Hall and its rich history. Explore our digital showcase of these wonderful artworks; from newspapers to textile exhibitions, sound installations to poems, plays and memoirs.

## Visitors Drop-In

The Wolfson (Welcome Room), Coetzee and Smith Rooms (aka 'Butcher's Shop & Rectory Rooms') are open for Visitors drop-in **Sunday to Wednesday, 10.0 to 3.0.**

## 'Stepping Into Dragon Hall' Fundors

This flagship capital and engagement project is kindly supported by:



## About the Project 4: What Happens Next? – the story continues!

The Step into Dragon Hall project draws to a close at the end of August but National Centre for Writing are committed to continuing to **explore heritage through creative writing**. They have received funding from the Linbury Trust for a **programme of activity 'Telling Our Stories: Creative Writing & Heritage for All'** which will commence in September. This programme will provide free engagement opportunities **for older people (age 60+) and Refugee & Asylum Seekers (various ages)**, facilitating the opportunity to voice and share their stories on themes of **Norwich's heritage, creative writing, and food**.

The Stepping into Dragon Hall project has been made possible by Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Norwich Freeman's Charity, the Wolfson Foundation and the Geoffrey Watling Charity.

- *With thanks to the National Centre for Writing, Lizzie Figura – Drane, (Programme Engagement Officer), Hannah Garrard, the artist Rose Feather and all the contributors for most of the text and images.*

## BACK TO THE FUTURE?

As mentioned above, the Project marks a partial return to the original vision for Dragon Hall:

- Aims of a proposed Trust in 1985 to run Dragon Hall as a heritage centre:

*"To fulfil the purposes .... of a Heritage Centre for the local population, tourists, visitors, schools, teachers, students etc, through the provision of educational material and displays, with meeting rooms for groups incorporating study material with archive photographs, slides, maps, documents, fact sheets, microfilms etc".*

- From draft of a publicity leaflet c.1987:

*"As a Heritage Centre Dragon Hall will house both permanent and changing displays and act as a centre for students, societies and organisations as well as the citizens of Norwich .... There will be visual aids, archive material, a small restaurant and a shop .... Visits could be linked with a boat trip and displays can include material from the Broads."*

- A Report in 1990



The medieval timber frame of Dragon Hall.

## Bringing the Dragon Back to Life

An amazing discovery in 1979 has led to ambitious plans for a Norfolk heritage centre in the ancient heart of Norwich. After five centuries of neglect and decay, the Norfolk and Norwich Heritage Trust is bringing Dragon Hall in King Street back to life.

- Eastern Evening News 1998

