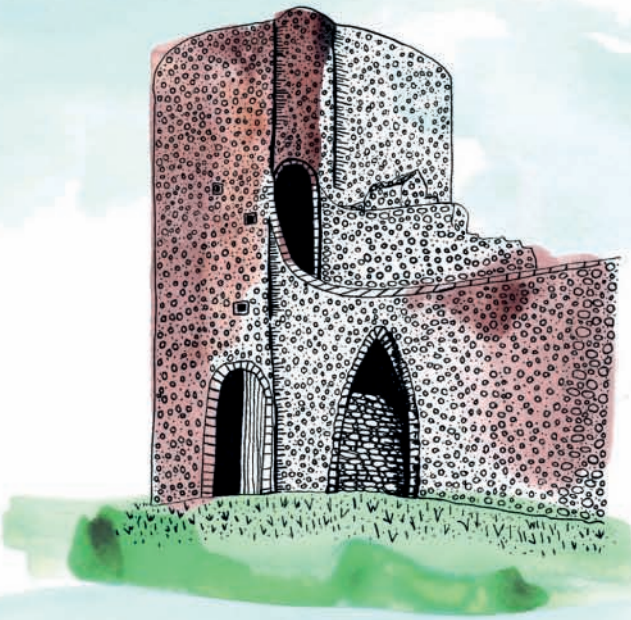
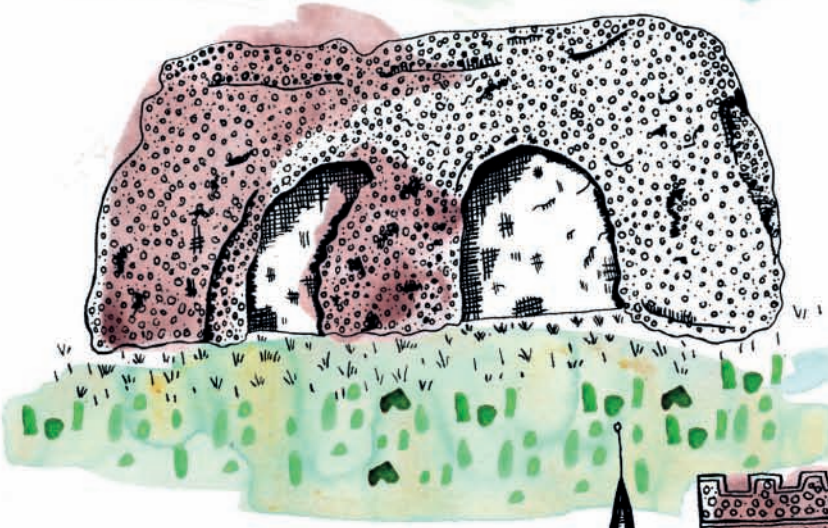
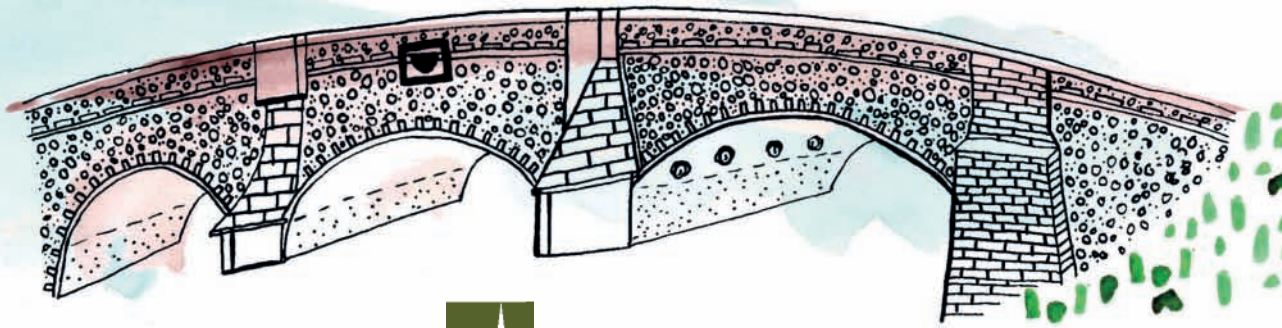
FRAGMENTS

of Norwich City Walls







The Norwich Society

The purpose of this publication is to celebrate the existence of Norwich's medieval city walls, provide some insights into their history and encourage people to explore them for themselves.

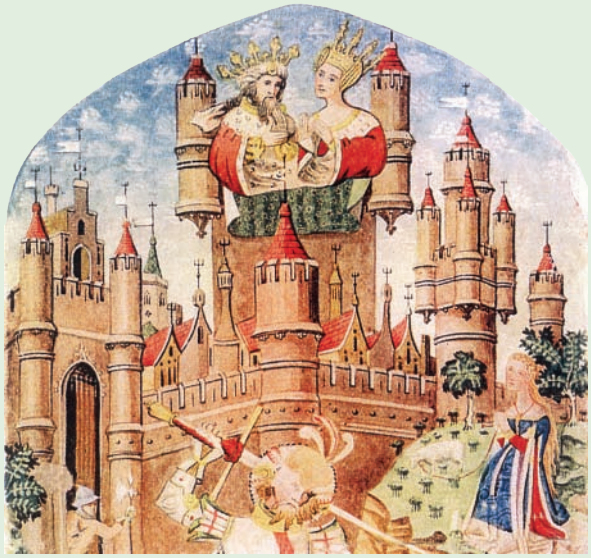


Illustration of a wall painting discovered in 1861 in St Gregory's Church Norwich.
It shows St George rescuing a maiden from the dragon outside a walled city.

FOREWORD

The city walls of Norwich, when completed in the mid-14th century, formed the longest circuit of urban defences in Britain, eclipsing even those of London. They included some 40 flint towers and 12 gateways with a brick-and-flint artillery tower – the Cow Tower – being added in 1398-99. The city walls fulfilled three functions: they provided defence against most forms of attack save concerted action by an army; they enabled the city to control access to and from the city, thus regulating trade and assisting taxation; and they provided a symbol of the city's distinctiveness, physically separating it from the countryside around. Even in decay, with its gateways demolished and large sections of the wall missing, the circuit is visible and is largely followed by the dual carriageway Inner Ring Road, itself providing a barrier between the historic core of Norwich and the area beyond.

This short publication seeks to capture some of the uses and meanings conveyed by the city walls over the centuries. It is not intended as a history of the walls but rather, through a series of vignettes supported by a brief historical outline, shows how the defences have defined the city and continue to do so. The walls have not always been popular; indeed, in 1847, one John Britton gave his opinion that '… these buildings serve to indicate the lamentable state of society in which our ancestors lived, and which is delightfully contrasted with that in which it is our good fortune to be placed'. In the 21st century, our similar good fortune should encourage us to adopt a more positive approach, respecting the remains of the city walls for the sense of identity which they gave to Norwich and which, with appropriate care, and interpretation, they can continue to give. This booklet is a welcome contribution to that aim.

Brian Ayers

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Ditch

When Norwich began to prosper and grow during the last years of the 12th century the crown granted the townspeople a degree of self-government. In return they paid an annual tax to the king. The easiest way to raise the money was to regulate trade and take a toll (tax) on goods coming into the town. They also needed to defend themselves from military attacks during the First Barons' War against King John, 1215-17.

In 1252 Norwich applied for, and was given, a Royal Licence by Henry III to construct a defensive ditch and bank. The ditch was nearly 4 metres deep and over 18 metres wide with the earth from it piled into a mound on the inner side. Other places, such as King's Lynn, Bruges and Amsterdam, filled their ditches with water but because of the lie of the land this was impossible for Norwich.

Historians think that the mound was topped by a wooden palisade, but there is some evidence to suggest that there may have been a low wall too. Although such defences could never have been impregnable, they were more than adequate for the purpose of taxation, with gates at strategic points.

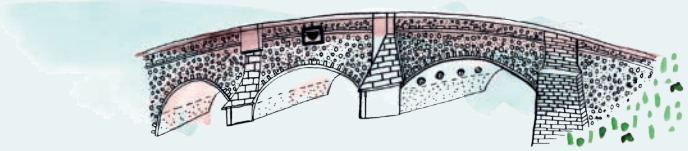
In 1266, during the Second Barons' War, a group of nobles from the Isle of Ely led by Sir John de Evide took Norwich by force. During their rampage they plundered its wealth, robbed and killed people and imprisoned or abducted many of the richest townspeople.

It was obvious that Norwich and its people were helpless against a strong attack and that better defences were necessary.

Section of an artist's impression of the Norwich City Walls showing the ditches. *Courtesy of Aviva Group Archive.*

Interior of the Cow Tower. *Photograph: Sarah Cocke.*

Mr Walls: Richard Spynk



Work on the walls began in 1294, but it progressed slowly. Despite several renewals of the murage (permission from the king to levy a tax to pay for the walls), the walls themselves was not completed until 1319/20, although they had no gates, towers or armaments. Nothing much was done about these until 1337, when the murage was renewed yet again. Even so it was not enough to complete the work until an entrepreneurial Norwich businessman, Richard Spynk, came to the rescue.

He and his brother had come from March (near Ely) in the early 1330s, probably in connection with the cloth trade. They prospered and settled in the then affluent Coslany area. Richard Spynk initially proposed a loan to enable the completion of the work on the walls. Unfortunately collecting the necessary levies to repay him proved difficult, some of the wealthier merchants even leaving Norwich to avoid doing so. Spynk then proposed to turn his loan into a donation, in return for certain privileges that would allow him, over time, to recoup his outlay. The deal he negotiated was a shrewd one: he would waive repayment of the loan if he and his heirs were exempt from taxation, from holding any office or serving on a jury or inquest or from any situation requiring an oath (all things that caused the individual concerned considerable expense), from paying any future costs of works relating to Norwich, and exempting merchants from taxes on merchandise bought from or sold to Spynk.

We do not know who actually planned, supervised or carried out the work on Norwich's walls. In Great Yarmouth each resident was required to give a certain number of days' labour a year to build the walls – the wealthy paid others to do the work for them. Perhaps this happened in Norwich too. The walls were finally completed in 1342, and a year later, on 10 December 1343, Spynk's generosity was honoured by the formal ratification of the bargain he had made.

Richard Spynk had reason to be grateful for the protection provided by the defences for which he had paid. In 1346 he began a legal case against the unscrupulous Bishop of Ely. It turned violent and he was effectively besieged in Norwich, not daring to venture beyond the protection of the walls. He probably died in 1384.

The line of the walls and all the streets going to and through the gates can still be seen in the street plan of modern Norwich.

A battlement or crenellated parapet is formed of solid upright sections called merlons separated by spaces called crenels. A succession of merlons and crenels is a crenellation. Merlons can be pierced by narrow vertical slits designed for observation and fire. Crenels designed for use by cannons were called embrasures.

Richard Spynk lives on in Susannah Gregory's novel, *The Devil's Disciples, The Fourteenth Chronicle of Matthew Bartholomew*, (2008.) The story mixes fact and fiction, incorporating real people from medieval East Anglia such as Richard Spynk.

The complete cost of the walls is not known but at the end of a long building programme, to which he also contributed 50 marks (£14,000 in today's money), Richard Spynk spent well over £200 (£86,000 today) completing and strengthening Norwich's walls and gates.

The carved heads under Bishop Bridge that are believed to be those of the Spynks family.
Photograph: Sarah Cocke.

Close-up of an aperture for firing arrows in section of wall at St Martin's at Oak.
Photograph:

Bishop Bridge when it still had a tower for defence and the river was much wider.
Courtesy Norwich Museum Services.

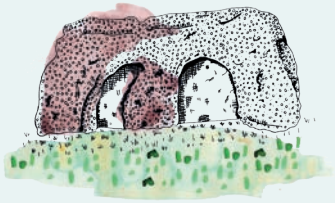
Keep You Out: Defence

On completion of the walls and gates in 1343, Richard Spynk also provided appropriate weaponry to defend the City. He funded 30 espringals or springalds (mechanical artillery devices for throwing large bolts or stones) and four arblasters (types of catapult) and gobions (stone balls). Ber Street Gate had six espringals, more than any of the other gates, together with locked wooden boxes of 100 gobions for ammunition.

The gates were fitted with strong oak doors and an iron portcullis. Each gate had a room above the archway which was used by the gatekeeper and guards. A protected walkway also ran round the walls. However, these armaments were practically obsolete as soon as they were installed because cannon became the siege weapon of choice. By the 1350s cannon were also added to the Norwich arsenal.

The Boom Towers on the River Wensum at Carrow were supplied with two great chains of Spanish iron, raised and lowered by a windlass to regulate river traffic entering and leaving the City.

The walls did not completely enclose the City. To the north, in the Great Hospital Meadow, the Cow Tower stood alone by the river and was designed solely as an artillery platform. The tower differs from the others in Norwich's defences in that it is entirely faced in brick (over a flint core) with stone dressings for the cross-loops. These loops are thought to have been designed for use by crossbows and handguns, and as such are the earliest in the country. They were made by the mason, Robert Snape, for 9s each, c.1389; such information very rarely survives.



Although the castle itself was an important stronghold it had been constructed for defence *against* the people of Norwich, not as protection for them. As a royal palace, it could never have been their refuge.

Ber Street Gate depicted in the mid twentieth century on a bas-relief plaque by John Moray-Smith, from a drawing by Henry Ninham. Located on the wall of the former Ber Street Gates Public House. *Photograph: xxx*

The Cow Tower in spring from the cathedral side. *Photograph: Sarah Cocke.*

A view of both Boom Towers and the wall running up to Carrow. *Photograph: Roger Last.*

Come You In: Taxation

St Stephen's Gate depicted in the mid twentieth century on a bas-relief plaque by John Moray-Smith from a drawing by Henry Ninham. Located on the wall of the Coachmaker's Arms Public House. *Photograph: Vicky Manthorpe.*

There were two rationales for constructing first the ditch and then the walls: defence and taxation.

This did not go down well with people living in the neighbouring villages who had previously been able to go in and out as they pleased. The monks, living on their own enclosed property near the cathedral, also objected to the wall, which cut across their land.

The defences provided a useful control over the movement of goods in and out of Norwich through the gates where they were easily inspected and taxed. Boats bringing goods by river docked at the town-centre wharves and quays which they reached through the Boom Towers where the toll was 4d for a 'ship of bulk' and 2d for others.

There must have been a considerable run off of water from Grapes Hill creating a substantial ditch because, in the late 15th century during the reign of Henry VII, it was stocked with fish. The grant of the fishing rights to the ditch provided an income of 5 shillings a year.

The River at Carrow with the Devil's Tower (Boom Tower) by J J Cotman.
Courtesy of Norwich Museum Services.

Documents suggest that in the late 14th century the Swine Market was moved from All Saints Green to a new site outside the walls which could provide a reason for creating a new passage through the wall.

The Treasurer's Accounts for 1384 record that £19 3s 4d was spent 'erecting the walls near Iron Doors'. (The name was changed to Brazen Gate in 1516/17.) This is a substantial amount of money and might imply that the work involved extensive alterations to create the gate.

The Brazen Gate looking into the City from a drawing by the historian and antiquarian John Kirkpatrick (1686-1728).
Courtesy of Norwich Museum Services.

Pomp and Pride: Royal Visitors

Norwich has hosted many a royal visit. According to tradition the ceiling of what is now the Eagle Ward in the Great Hospital was painted in honour of Anne of Bohemia, wife of Richard ll, during a visit they paid to Norwich in 1383. Anne was the daughter of Charles lV, the Holy Roman Emperor and the most powerful man in Europe; the painted eagles are thought to represent his imperial emblem.

Elizabeth Woodville, consort of Edward IV, visited Norwich on 18 July 1469. She arrived at the Westwyck Gate and was received by the Mayor and civic dignitaries. On a stage covered in red and green worsted were figures of angels, two giants made of wood and leather and stuffed with straw, as well as shields and banners. Attendants were dressed as two patriarchs, the 12 apostles and 16 virgins in hooded mantles.

Queen Elizabeth I was greeted with an equally lavish welcome when she visited Norwich in August 1558. The Queen was met by the Mayor and Council at the city boundary where she was welcomed and presented with the sword of the City. At St Stephen's Gate, which had been especially decorated with 'cords made of herbs and flowers, with garlands, coronets, pictures, rich cloths, and a thousand devices', her arrival was heralded by the City Waits, and just inside the gate a stage had been set up for a presentation by children of the City. A mock gateway had been constructed to form an appropriate entry to the market place. The crowds were so great it took Elizabeth six hours to cross the City. At the end of the visit Elizabeth rode out through the gate at St Benedict's on her way to Costessey.

Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Norwich is depicted in Benjamin Britten opera, Gloriana, based on Lytton Strachey's Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History, (1928.) In Act 2, Scene 1 the Queen and the Earl of Essex visit Norwich where a masque celebrating Time and Concord is given in her honour. The first performance of the opera was at the Royal Opera House, London, in 1953 during the celebrations of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The Queen is seated bottom left while the spire of Norwich cathedral can be seen in the centre of the backcloth.
Photograph: Roger Wood, copyright The Royal Opera House Collections.

Rubbish and Repairs

Part of the city wall near the old Gildencroft jousting field.
Photograph: Roy Holmes.

Close-up of repairs to the walls showing what is possibly Tudor brick work.
Photograph: Roy Holmes.

Maintaining the walls has always been a problem. Even before their completion a writ authorised the bailiffs to rate all holders of tenements, whether foreign or native, for any future repair of the walls. Furthermore, the City was to appoint wardens to protect the walls and ditches, and to see that they were properly maintained. If the wardens were 'derelict' in their duty, Spynk or his heirs could have them removed from office and others appointed.

In 1437 it was ordained that every new Mayor should, in May or June, survey and inspect all the walls, towers and the river or pay a penalty of 100 shillings.

In 1451 repair of the walls was apportioned among the 12 aldermen of the City. In addition wealthy individuals sometimes left bequests for this. For example, in 1456 Ralph Segryme, a former Mayor, left £200 (about £100,000 today) for the repair of the walls and £10 (£5,000 today) to clean the river.

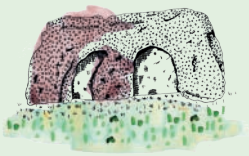
Some gates were damaged during Kett's rebellion of 1549, and these were 'made new'.

In 1291 or 1292 Roger, son of Richard de Augustine, was fined 6d (about £13 today) because he undermined the walls at St Augustine's Gate, and the Prior of Norwich was fined half a mark (6s 8d or £175) because he allowed his swine to forage in the ditch. Two years later Robert de Readham was fined 12d for carrying away a tree valued at 6d from St Augustine's Gate to his own house.

Each quarter year there was to be a proclamation in the City, street by street, gate by gate, reminding everyone that no one was to let animals stray into the ditches, or throw anything into them or into the arches of the City walls, or to hang any cloth on the walls, on pain of being fined. Miscreants were charged 1d (about £2.50 today) for each foot of the beast(s) of the men of the City, 2d for each foot of the beast(s) of foreign men, 4d per cloth, 4d if caught dumping rubbish.

Remaining tower and part of the wall at the top of Ber Street. This is the highest remaining section of wall. *Photograph: Roger Last.*

Threats, Dangers, Terrors



Xxx Tower
Photograph:

Pockthorpe Tower near Silver Road
Photograph:

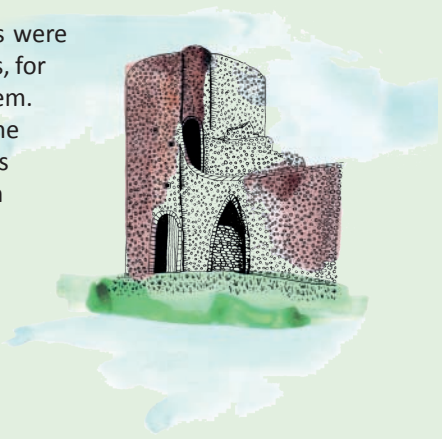
The City had a curfew system. St Giles' Church, built in the 14th century not far from St Giles' Gate and at the highest point within the walls, had a curfew bell. In the 15th century John Colton, a citizen of Norwich, became lost in marshy ground and saved himself by following the sound of the bell. When he died c.1468 he bequeathed some land, known as Colton's Acre next to the Mitre pub on Earlham Road, to establish a charitable fund to support the poor and maintain the church tower and the curfew bell. During the winter the bell was rung at 6am in the morning and 8pm in the evening and in summer at 5am and 9pm. This benefaction subsequently became a charitable trust. A terrace of houses built on or near the site in more recent times is called Curfew Terrace. In 1991 101 Curfew Terrace was apparently still owned by the Trust.

In over 200 years the walls were only breached once, in 1549. Earlier, in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt, rebels had got into Norwich, but that was because sympathetic townspeople opened the gates to them.

The Peasants' Revolt was a major rebellion against poll taxes levied to fund the Hundred Years' War (1337 to 1453) – a series of conflicts between the kings of England and the French royal house of Valois for control of the kingdom of France. The insurrection began in Essex and spread to other parts of England. On 17 June the rebels assembled outside Norwich and killed Sir Robert Salle, who was in charge of the defences and had attempted to negotiate a settlement. The people then opened the gates to let the rebels in. Looting followed but the rebellion lasted less than a fortnight. (There was an invasion scare in 1385, but it came to nothing when the invading force sailed northwards to Northumbria and Scotland.)

The breaching of the walls occurred in 1549, during Kett's Rebellion. Kett's troops, camped on the high ground of Mousehold Heath, could fire their cannon over the walls, clearly demonstrating that they were now obsolete for defence.

During the Civil War in 1643 some of the gates were strengthened. Magdalene and Pockthorpe Gates, for instance, were ramped up with earth to seal them. However, the only damage to Norwich came from inside the city. Inter-factional tensions culminated in the 'Great Blow' of 1648 when barrels of gunpowder stored at the Royalist Committee House on Bethel Street exploded, killing several people, shattering the windows



'I was a member of St Giles' church from 1955 to 1961 [and] one of several parishioners who used to ring the tolling bell every evening – I think the churchwarden drew up a rota. We would ring the date and 100 rings at 9pm in summer and 8pm in winter.' Memories of a bell ringer by Julia de Salis.
Curfew bells were also rung at St Peter Mancroft and St Lawrence. The tolling of the bells marked the beginning or end of daily activity. As the bells rang, the main gates of the City were opened or closed.

At the ceremony for appointing a new Mayor the keys of the city gates were given to him as a sign of his authority and responsibility.
The Norfolk Museums Collections include a large iron key said to have been for one of the city gates.

Beyond the Pale: Death and Disease

Unsavoury activities were relegated to outside the walls. When crimes were committed in Norfolk but not in the three principal towns (Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn), executions usually took place within the Castle precinct. However, when such crimes were committed in Norwich, executions took place on the gallows that stood outside Magdalen Gate on a hillside between today's Northcote and Churchill Roads. This had been the City's place of execution from at least the 13th century, although by 1649 executions were taking place at the Castle ditches.

The high-profile hangings outside Magdalen Gate were cases of treason. In August 1549, at the end of Kett's Rebellion, 30 traitors were hanged, drawn and quartered there. However, recent research has shown that theft was by far the most common reason for hanging. During the second half of the 16th century there was on average one hanging in Norwich a year and almost all were for the theft of valuable items such as a horse, a sword or 12s 2d (£325).

By the early 14th century there were six leper hospitals, or lazar houses, outside the gates of Norwich. These were isolated quasi-religious communities that had been set up to care for lepers, who were regarded as suffering from a disease given as a judgement from God. Although by law lepers had to be separated from the general community, their hospitals were at key points on the main approaches to a town or city. This was to increase the likelihood of prayers and gifts from passers-by.

By 1500 leprosy was declining and the leper hospitals were opening their doors to the sick and infirm poor of the City. After the Reformation they were no longer under religious control and, as the 16th century progressed, they came increasingly under the City authorities. During the 17th century most of them ceased to have any public health or charitable function. However, the leper hospital outside St Augustine's Gate was the site of pest houses during outbreaks of the bubonic plague in the 17th century, a workhouse infirmary (in the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries) and a lunatic asylum (much of the 19th century).

Magdalen Street Gate looking in towards the City by the historian and antiquarian John Kirkpatrick (1686-1728).
Courtesy Norfolk Museums Services.

Norwich viewed from the Butter Hills with the Carrow Tower ruins in the foreground.
Engraved by E. Goodall from a painting by J. Stark.
Courtesy Norfolk Museums Services.

The Lazar House or Leper house 1850.
Drawing by John Wadderspoon.

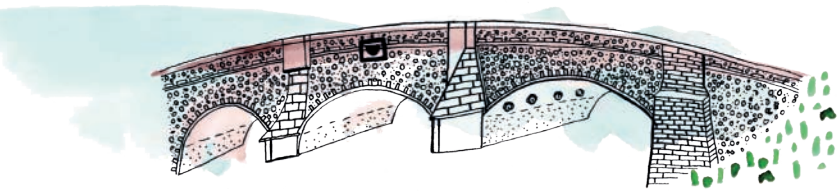
The oldest leper hospital, built between 1101 and 1119, was dedicated to St Mary Magdalen. The infirmary hall, which would have had a chapel at its eastern end, still stands near the junction of Gilman and Sprowston Roads. For most of the 20th century it was the Lazar House Branch Library. The other five were set up in the second half of the 13th century or early in the 14th century just outside the newly established gates of the City.

In the 17th century many victims of plague, like lepers before them, were made to live in small wooden houses or huts. They were called pest houses and were built at St Augustine's Gate leper hospital and on Butter Hills near the Black Tower. In the 1620s and 30s the Black Tower itself was converted into a pest house. At the same time two towers, one of them near Brazen Doors, were appointed 'for a prison for such infected poor as would not be ruled'.

Gardens inside the Walls

From the late 17th until the mid-19th century Norwich had a succession of fashionable pleasure gardens and was considered to be the equal of any city in England outside London. The Wilderness, which opened around 1750 just inside the city wall by the junction of Bracondale and Carrow Hill, behind Stuart and Alan Roads, achieved considerable popularity. In 1768 public breakfasts were held in the gardens; in the evenings the walls were lit up and there were illuminated walks through the gardens taking in views from the city wall towers. By 1771 the walls and the gardens were privately owned and the Black Tower was called Mackarel's Tower.

At that time the land now occupied by the bus station was a large open garden or orchard. However Millard and Manning's map of 1830 shows that by then in that area the towers and wall were surrounded by tightly packed buildings on both sides of the wall for much of its length.

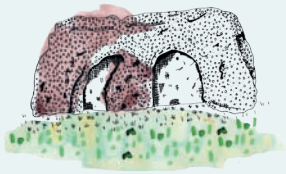


Daniel Defoe described a charmingly pastoral city during his tour of Britain, 1724-26. 'The walls of this city are reckoned three miles in circumference, taking in more ground than the city of London; but much of the ground lying open in pasture-fields and gardens.'

King Street ruins incorporated in a garden.
Photograph: Sarah Cocke.

The Garden at 167 Oak Street

Modern plaque on the wall of a house on Oak Street indicating that it was once the Old Dun Cow public house.
Photograph: Michael Dunford.



WHEN the present occupants moved into 167 Oak Street in the 1970s they wanted a place near the river. They were also attracted to a building with a fascinating history and known in the 19th century as the Dun Cow Public House. There were also some remains of the old City Walls in the basement and of a Tower alongside the garden. The story is an ongoing one and worth the telling.

TO SIT in their tranquil garden encircled by ancient trees (including an oak) is to become immersed in history and surrounded by it. The public house on that site was built directly onto the foundations of the City Wall in its last stretch leading to the river. At the end, beside what was probably a muddy stream, was St Martin's Gate, formerly known as Coslany Gate. In that area it is conjectured there might have been a 'Jousting Field' in Oak Wall Lane, and on an island between the stream and the main channel, a bleaching ground.

ADJACENT to the garden are the remains of the last structure along that northern section of the wall - Oak Street Tower – accessed by a public pathway. It is in danger of neglect and advancing vegetation, but is a clear and visible witness to its historical usefulness. Inside the main house, and in the basement, where no doubt the beer barrels were delivered through the hatch, are some impressive remains of the ancient City Walls, serving as a dividing wall. Even in their much reduced state they are redolent of a fascinating past.

TO IMAGINE what it was like in olden times is the subject of precious maps and drawings, of archaeological surveys and City oversight. Any project that will introduce our citizens and the visiting public to this continuing story and to engage in the vital work of preservation and refurbishment is surely important and worthwhile. The history and the indeed the present vulnerability of Oak Street Tower must be part of that process.

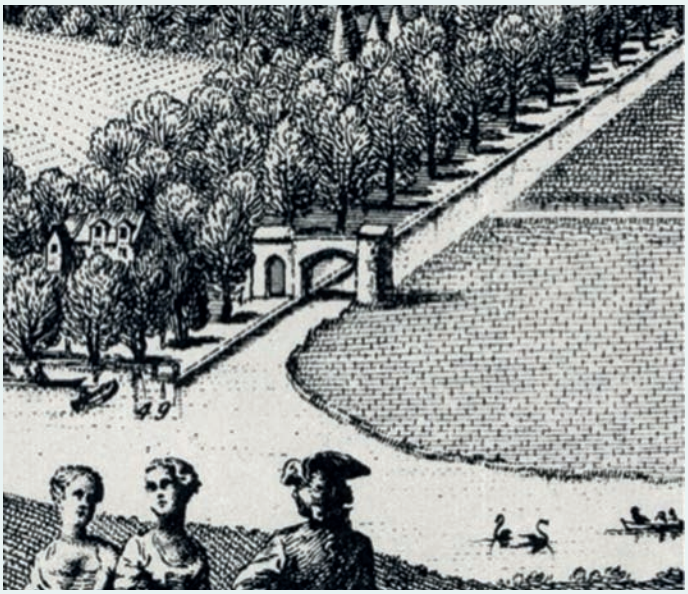
Romantic Ruins and Entertainments

The Cow Tower in the nineteenth century with people promenading along the tree-lined path. *Courtesy Norfolk Museums Services.*

The Picturesque, an appreciation of the roughness and variety in nature and buildings, especially ruins, flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This aesthetic provided the inspiration for artists and enthused those of artistic sensibilities. The proximity of Norwich's crumbling medieval walls to the various pleasure gardens would have added a fashionable aesthetic element to the entertainments.

The decade from 1780 was the golden age of the 'aerostatic globe', as balloons were called, and the people of Norwich were enthusiastic about them. There were many demonstration flights, both manned and unmanned, from the various pleasure gardens. In 1829 a Balloon Display took place in the Wilderness Gardens. The cost of attending was two shillings, or three shillings (around £5 or £10) for the better viewing positions. Seats on the upper walk provided exclusive accommodation for the nobility and gentry.

However, the craze for the Picturesque was short-lived. In the mid 19th century the Corporation of Norwich removed several portions of the city wall adjacent to the Wilderness Gardens, replacing them with railings to create more level space.



Eighteenth century gentry at leisure in the gardens near the river. *From a map.*

The Black Tower at Carrow from an *Album of Norwich Views c 1890.*

"Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney, and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill. To see and explore either the ramparts and keep of the one, or the cloisters of the other, had been for many weeks a darling wish". Catherine Morland eagerly anticipates a visit to *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen 1798/9

Walled in: At Home in the Walls

When the walls were first built each gate had a room above the archway which was used by the gatekeeper. These rooms were also used by guards posted at the gates and intermediate towers along the wall in times of need. In 1461 an Assembly Roll recorded instructions for a number of gates to have soldiers posted to control movement while the remaining gates were closed and locked. As the need for defence lessened the guardrooms began to be used for other purposes.

By the 16th century buildings and dwellings were being built against the inside of the walls. Hochstetter's map of 1789 shows that two long narrow buildings had been squeezed between the wall and the narrow lane just inside it. The map also shows the ditch near St Stephen's Gate had been filled in and there were buildings outside much of the wall. The houses near St Stephen's Gate, probably the first built outside the wall, backed onto the wall itself.

In the 19th century the expansion of the City outside its walls resulted in them being incorporated into a variety of buildings. In 1842 the wall from Baker's Road to Magdalen Gate was partly rebuilt from within and the towers converted into cottages. Houses were built into the walls at 216-222 St Catherine's Plain/Queens Road and 2-12 Queens Road. Part of the wall became integral to an internal wall in 60, 62 and 64 Chapelfield Road. The even numbers 10-26 Grapes Hill made use of the wall – 20 feet high along this stretch. At 38-40 Grapes Hill recesses in the wall were converted into outhouses. Other sections of the wall incorporated intobuildings were at Grapes Hill/Duck Lane and Barn Road.

The redundant towers provided ready-made accommodation on two floors. Near St Augustine's the remains of a tower were incorporated into and used as the scullery of 2 Magpie Road. Number 80 Chapelfield Road incorporated a tower – three-sided on the City side and semi-circular on the outer side. A doorway was cut through the north-west side of the tower, the ground floor converted into a kitchen and the upper chamber became a bedroom.

The Volunteer Drill Hall in Chapelfield Road was opened in 1886 by the Prince and Princess of Wales. It was built of flint and red brick in the castellated Gothic style and incorporated one of the medieval towers, which served as an officers' room. The Drill Hall was demolished in the 1970s for the Grapes Hill Roundabout, but the position of the tower is marked in modern cobbles set into grass on the roundabout.

The Drill Hall at the top of Grapes Hill where it meets Chapelfield Road. One of the old City Wall towers was incorporated into the entrance.
Photograph: 1910 City Walls Survey.

Photograph from the 1970s showing terrace houses close to the wall and tower at xxx

A view of the Drill Hall at the Grapes Hill roundabout.
Photograph from a postcard.

Grapes Hill in the early twentieth century when houses were built up close to the Walls.
Photograph: 1910 City Walls Survey

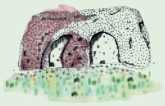
As housing expanded so did that vital service, the public house. These also used the walls to save on construction costs and building materials, for example the Richmond Hill pub at Ber Street/Bracondale. The remains of the base of what was called the Tower by the Water, at Coslany, form part of the rear of the Dun Cow pub in Oak Street near its junction with Baker's Road. It was rumoured that the Magpie pub stood on the site of a tower. Certainly there is a piece of the city wall to the east of the pub and in the cellar is some rough masonry which may have been the tower's foundation.

In the middle of the 15th century, the Broad Tower between Brazen Doors and Ber Street was leased to a tenant for 10 years at 2s per annum (£50 in today's money).

At an Assembly at Michaelmas 1483 it was agreed that Robert Godard, a hermit, should have his dwelling over the gate and the custody of the ditches of the City as far as they extend for the aldermanry of St Stephen's for a yearly rent of 6s 8d and that he should repair the chamber and the 'soller' (the room above) that he occupied.
On 30 May 1660, 'The said Broad Tower was ordered to be leased out to Mr Will Tooke, Alderman Robt Howard, Jeosaphat Davy, and other Inhabitants of All Saints' parish, for 21 years at 2s per ann.'

The Black Tower was converted into a snuff mill and in 1783 the tenant, Walter Livingstone, was described in Chase's Norwich directory as a Snuffmaker and Tobbaconist [sic] at 52, Market Place, with a Snuff Mill at the Wilderness. He appears to have retired from business by 1790. The mill was then used for driving cotton spinning machinery but the owner, William White, was bankrupt in 1800.

Tumbling Down



Over the centuries Norwich's citizens have been reluctant to pay for maintenance and the walls gradually became more of a hindrance than a benefit. The problems associated with preservation and maintenance include the use of damaging cement mortar in past repairs, graffiti and vandalism, slipped facings, a rotten core and invasive vegetation.

1790/1810 Merchants and the council were keen to open up the City to encourage trade. The walls were also seen as a health hazard – preventing the free circulation of air and creating an unhealthy 'miasma'. Most of the gateways were demolished in 1793 and 1794. Ber Street Gate was dismantled in 1807 and the last gate to survive, that at Magdalen Street, was removed in 1808.

1865 When Prince of Wales Road was built in 1865 the Corporation, seeing the old city wall at Chapelfield as an obstacle in need of demolition, did two jobs at once and used the city wall debris as part of the road's foundation.

1910 In the 20th century the official attitude towards the walls changed. The City Council carried out a major survey and concluded that the walls should be preserved as treasured possessions of this historic city.

1942 On 27 April the last remaining vestige of a gate was obliterated when a bomb fell near St Benedict's Gate, wrecking houses and causing considerable damage. When the site was cleared the city wall was allowed to remain.

1945 Although there was considerable conflict of interest when new developments or roads were planned, there was recognition of the cultural significance of the walls, and the need to preserve them. Unfortunately, efforts to preserve the walls were patchy and inconsistent, leading to considerable damage and demolition.

1960s The new inner ring road followed the lines of the walls and efforts were made to preserve the walls where feasible and to set them in roadside gardens. However, the irresistible rise of the car resulted in the sacrifice of several sections of wall.

1963/4 A Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society report noted that 'The tower incorporated in the Drill Hall Chapelfield Road/Barn Road could be demolished without serious loss.'

View of the Boom Towers from under the railway bridge. *Photograph: Sarah Cocke.*

1970 Norwich City Council commissioned another report on the walls and restated its commitment to preserving individual sections so that the line of the wall would be clear and would be a positive feature clearly defining the old city. Sadly this did not prevent the walls at the top of Grapes Hill being destroyed to create the modern road.

1990s Norwich City Council commissioned Purcell Miller Tritton and Historic Building Surveys Ltd to produce a survey of the City's medieval walls. Much historic information was discovered and this has been drawn together in an excellent report, which is available on the Norwich City Council website.

2006 Norwich HEART (Heritage Economic and Regeneration Trust) and EEDA (East of England Development Agency) commissioned a feasibility study to promote public awareness of the walls, suggesting ways in which the walls could be improved through repairs and maintenance, by attention to their setting, and the provision of safe access. The report explored ways in which the walls could be interpreted and promoted, including the idea of recreating St Stephen's Gate, which was once the principal gate of the City. No action was ever taken.

Present day Norwich City Council is currently responsible for the maintenance of the walls with advice from @Historic England.

Ruins of a tower at St Stephen's and Queen's Road with the multi-storey car park in the background. *Photograph: Sarah Cocke.*

The Future of the Walls

View of the repaired section of wall at Barn Road 2015.
Photograph: Vicky Manthorpe.

The people of Norwich take great pride in the city walls, which is shared by their City Council. The problem has been that the level of maintenance historically has been too low to keep them in good condition. Many sections of the wall are difficult for the public to recognise as being part of the medieval defences of the city. Cities such as Chester and York took measures to repair and show off their walls as a major part of the character of their city and their tourist industry has benefited. We should do the same.

How might this be done? Selective restoration is one option -

- The rebuilding of the boom towers on the river would restore a city scene much loved by Norwich School artists.
- Replacing crenellations at places where they would be best seen, such as adjacent to main roads would mark them out as being medieval defences. The bottom of Grapes Hill and the top of Magdalen Street are obvious places for this.
- Some of the towers are in a condition where comparatively little work is needed to restore them. The Black tower could be reroofed and the floors reinserted.

Reconstruction or marking the line of the walls offer other solutions -

- The largest stretch where people cannot see surviving sections is from All Saints Green to Ber Street. The normal sense of enclosure of a central city urban space is lacking and people have no clue that this is part of the boundary of the ancient city. Reconstruction of a small stretch here would address this.
- Alternatively, sculptural or similar features could be erected where the walls, gates or towers do not survive.
- Where substantial sections of walls survive, they are frequently hidden. The magnificent section on Carrow Hill is one of the finest in the country but needs a vastly improved setting so that it can be admired and appreciated. The 1970 report on the walls recommended the creation of a linear park. This was approved and a section was constructed on Bakers Road and some on Grapes Hill. This idea should be revived and implemented where it still makes sense.

The Vision

Each section of the walls would need individual consideration but there should be a guiding principle. This could be that the walls or the site of the walls be obvious to the public and that they form the boundary of the medieval city.

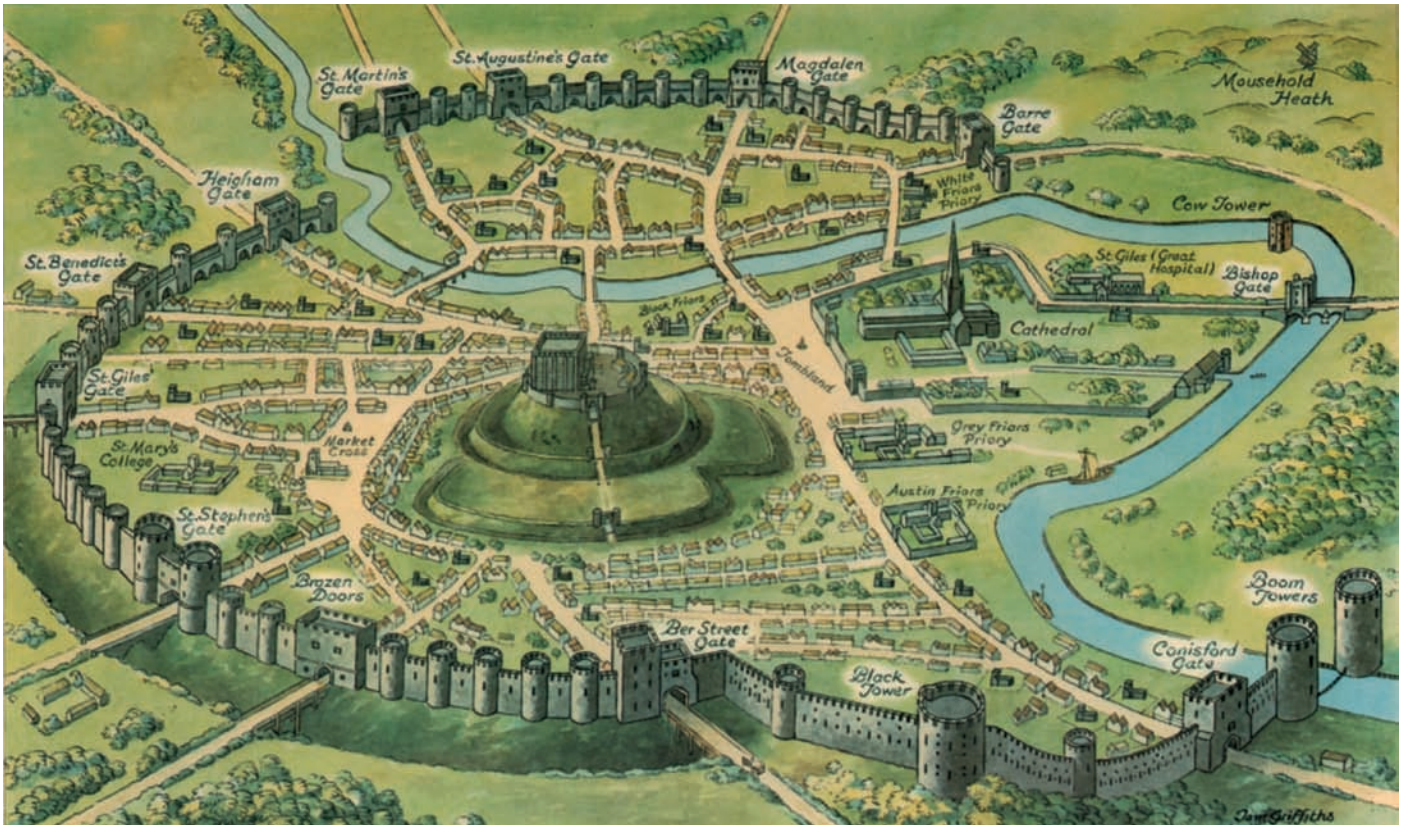
The medieval painting of St George and the Dragon depicts an idealised Norwich. Let us make the walls once again the most prominent feature of this fine City, a mark of its power and status. Let us plan a sophisticated restoration so that once more they can play that role.

Celia Fiennes visited Norwich in 1698 and observed that the walls “seeme the best repaire of any walled city I know, tho’ in some places there are little breaches, but the carving and battlements and towers looks well”.

In 1749 one William Clarke, mason, was ordered to repair the doorway he had made through the wall near the Magdalene gate, which he was using as a passage-way to and from his house.

The Norfolk Annals for January 18, 1807 record that a length of about 40 yards of the wall near Ber Street Gate fell with a tremendous crash, killing four cows.

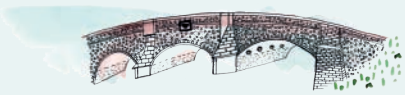
Plaque on the wall at Barn Road. *Photograph: Vicky Manthorpe.*

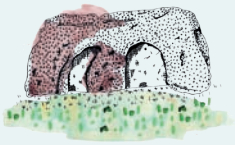


An artist's impression by D. Griffiths of the Norwich City Walls at the time of their completion in the mid fourteenth century and also showing the ditches.
Courtesy of Aviva Group Archive.

A Selection of Sources and Further Reading:

(All these publications can be found through the Millennium Library at the Forum.)





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