

King Street

A self-guided trail of
Norwich's medieval churches
to celebrate the city's cultural heritage



St Mary the Less
St Peter Parmentergate
St Julian
St Etheldreda

Includes eight of the lost
medieval churches of Norwich



Medieval Norwich and its Churches

For the first time in its history, and under a new initiative led by the Norwich Historic Churches Trust working closely with its heritage partners, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Norwich is presented as a significant medieval city through its churches.

Norwich is a City of Churches. It has a collection of thirty-one medieval churches, more than any other European city north of the Alps, memorials in flint and stone to its rich heritage and former position as the second city in the kingdom. In the High Middle Ages (from about 1200 to 1550) Norwich was also described as Europe's most religious city, with a tradition of anchorites and hermits and a number of informal (and fairly transient) groups of women living together in chastity, but also which were in all likelihood influenced by the *béguinages* (establishments housing members of a lay sisterhood) of the Low Countries.



Image: St Gregory



Image: St Stephen's

According to the Domesday Book of 1086 there were between forty-nine and fifty-four churches and chapels in Norwich. Of these at least eight existed before the Norman Conquest but there were possibly many more – up to about twenty five. The pre-Conquest churches would have been simple timber buildings with a rectangular nave and a slightly narrower chancel. Being built of timber there is little surviving evidence of them. Many of the early pre-conquest churches were lost as the Normans drastically changed the city landscape by building the castle and the cathedral, and moving the old Saxon market place from Tombland.

By the mid-13th century there were around sixty churches and chapels, after which the number gradually declined. The 15th century witnessed a major programme of extension, alteration or rebuilding of the city's churches which provided the legacy visible today. Almost all the churches were refurbished, in particular the naves which were the responsibility of the parish. Evidence of this can be seen today at St Peter Hungate, rebuilt by the Paston family during the 1460s and at St Gregory with its wall paintings of St George, considered one of the finest of its type in the country.

The money to pay for the work came from the wealthy citizens of Norwich in donations and bequests left to the church in which they worshipped and in which they were later buried. Several of these citizens became prominent Mayors of Norwich.

In 1502 there were still forty-six churches and chapels in Norwich, but the number was reduced during the Reformation of the 1540s when the city's great priories were closed and sold and when fourteen churches were closed. There were further church closures during the late nineteenth century and four churches lost to bombing in 1942 (Sts Benedict, Paul, Michael-at-Thorn, and Julian).

Currently there are thirty-one medieval churches within the City of Norwich, nine are still in use as places of worship, eighteen are managed by The Norwich Historic Churches Trust which finds suitable tenants for them, three are in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust and one is privately owned.



Image: St Peter Mancroft



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King Street

The trail begins at St Mary-the-Less, on the corner of Tombland and Queen Street, and proceeds south along the street.

1 St Mary-the-Less

This is a challenge to find, as it is hidden away behind the Haart offices! You need to make a short detour down Queen Street to find the entrance, and you can see the tower rising above the surrounding buildings. Declared redundant in 1542, it has had a very chequered history ever since, serving as a cloth hall; a church for French-speaking Protestants; home to two other denominations; a parish hall; and a furniture store. It is now in private ownership, and access is very difficult.

2 St Cuthbert (lost)

This church, dedicated to the Northumbrian saint, stood on the east side of Upper King Street. Its site is marked by St Cuthbert's House. The church was demolished in 1535, as it was surplus to requirements.

3 St John the Evangelist (lost)

The site of this church was on the corner of Rose Lane and King Street, underneath the modern office building. When the Franciscan (Grey) Friars came to Norwich in 1300, they had a site extending from Rose Lane to the Cathedral and from King Street to the river, and St John's was closed.

4 St Peter Parmentergate

Parmenters were leather and parchment workers, so this church's name tells us that they worked in this area (street of the leather-workers). There has probably been a church on this site since Anglo-Saxon times, but the building you see now dates from the late fifteenth century. Like the other churches on this side of the street, it stands well above the flood plain of the river. It was closed for worship in 1980, and is now used as a martial arts gym.

Points of interest:

- the medieval stalls (seats) in the chancel, put here for a college of priests.
- the Berney-Hobart monument of 1623, recently restored

(alas, it is in a cupboard for protection!)

- the highly-coloured reredos (screen behind the altar) of 1889, given by the Vicar in memory of his wife.
- the unusual two-storey vestry attached to the east wall. (St Peter Mancroft has a three-storey one.)

5 St Michael Conesford (lost)

As with St John Evangelist, this church was taken over by a friary – in this case, the Augustinian Friars. Their site extended from Mountergate to St Anne Lane, and from King Street to the river. They closed and demolished the church in 1360.

6 St Anne (lost)

Not much is known about this church. It seems to have stood near the river at the end of St Anne Lane. We do not even know when it was demolished.

Go up St Julian's Alley on the other side of the street, to find

7 St Julian

Its churchyard once extended down to King Street, but was gradually built on, leaving the church stranded up its alley. It was destroyed in 1942, and rebuilt (except for the tower) in 1958, but about half the fabric is original, dating from around 1100.

The church is famous worldwide, as it is where the anchoress (solitary) Julian of Norwich lived and wrote her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*, in the fourteenth century. In the 1958 rebuild, a reconstruction of her cell was added to the church.

Points of interest:

- the stained-glass window between the church and the cell, with a lily crucifix.
- the Norman doorway to the cell, which was brought here from the bombed church of St Michael-at-Thorn (on Ber Street).
- the font of about 1420, with the twelve Apostles round the bowl and other saints on the stem. It was brought here from All Saints church on Ber Street when it closed in 1977.
- the partly-rebuilt round tower – one of four surviving in Norwich. (Another is next door at St Etheldreda). Its bell is medieval, and was rehung in the tower in 1992.

8 St Clement-at the-Well (lost)

This church stood on the site of the Waterfront music venue. It got its name as it stood close to a public well. It was closed in 1560, and partly demolished, though some remains stood until at least 1829.

9 St Etheldreda

Etheldreda founded Ely Abbey (now Cathedral), and died there in 679. The Abbey had to provide men to garrison the Castle in Norwich, and this church may have started out as their chapel. The fabric is mainly Norman (c1100-1200), but with later mediæval alterations, and a major make-over in 1882. The round tower has a later octagonal top, which was rebuilt in 1723. It was the last of the city churches to lose its thatch roof.

It was closed in 1961, and since 1981 has been in use as artists' studios.

Points of interest:

- the finely-carved (though heavily restored) archway to the south door. (Visible through the gates if the church is closed.)
- monument of 1611 to William Johnson in the chancel, brought here from St Peter Southgate.
- the very stumpy round tower, with its late-medieval octagonal top.

Go through the west gate of the churchyard to find the site of

10 St Edward-the-Martyr (lost)

This church stood to the immediate south-west of St Etheldreda (the churchyards may even have touched), more or less across the entrance to Argyle Street. Edward was King of England (975-979), and was murdered at Corfe Castle. Miracles were reported at his grave, and he became regarded as a saint. (Not to be confused with Edward the Confessor.) In 1269 a merchant called Hildebrond founded a hospital at this church. Church and hospital were closed and demolished in 1540.

Now either walk along Argyle Street, or return to King Street and then take the steps up Southgate Lane, to the site of

11 St Peter Southgate (lost)

St Peter was demolished in 1884, except for part of the tower which still stands in its churchyard; this is now a children's playground. What you can see is its west wall and window: the earth has been raised around it. The church extended eastwards towards King Street.

12 St Olaf (lost)

The final church of the street stood on the east side, immediately opposite St Peter Southgate. (There is a green plaque on the old flour mill). It seems to have been demolished as early as 1345.

This is the end of this trail but do look out for our other self-guided trails of the city's medieval churches.



Image: St Peter Parmentergate

King Street

This tour takes about 45 minutes to an hour, and will take you past the four surviving and eight lost churches of King Street, an ancient roadway running south to north through the city. It was very busy with merchants in the Middle Ages, but gradually became a poor area as they moved elsewhere.

With this brief introduction to these churches it is hoped that you will want to return and spend more time enjoying them and the other medieval churches which grace our city. There is a wealth of information about the city's medieval churches and the treasures they contain in 'The Medieval Churches of Norwich' by Nicholas Groves, 'Medieval Norwich' edited by Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson, and 'Women and Religion in Late Medieval Norwich' by Carole Hill.

These self-guided trails are published by the Norwich Historic Churches Trust. They are part of a special citywide cultural celebration and are designed to enable you to enjoy the city's medieval churches at your leisure.



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The Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral; the Diocese of Norwich; The Medieval Parish Churches of Norwich Research Project (University of East Anglia) including The Leverhulme Trust and Norwich Research Park; Norwich City Council; Norfolk County Council; The Churches Conservation Trust; Norfolk Museums Service; The Norwich Society; Gildencraft Stone Masonry, the Friends of Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the tenants of all the churches in their care.

Norwich Historic Churches Trust

The Norwich Historic Churches Trust (NHCT) cares for eighteen Grade I listed medieval churches in the city that are no longer used for worship and have been deconsecrated. Established in 1973 it has found new uses for them and ensured their protection and maintenance. The churches managed by the NHCT are home to a number of major cultural activities including the Norwich Arts Centre, the Norwich Puppet Theatre, the Thalia Theatre Company and the Wharf Academy. If not open regularly for business, these churches are largely accessible during Heritage Open Days in September each year.

If you would like to know more about the churches managed by the Norwich Historic Churches Trust, whether it be taking on a tenancy of a church, gaining access to one or just finding out more about our buildings please contact the Administrator Stella Eglinton: stella.eglington@norwich-churches.org
Tel: (01603) 611530

For further information about the history of our churches, the people associated with them and the monuments they contain visit: www.norwich-churches.org. To learn more about the activities of the Friends of Norwich Historic Churches go to: www.fnhct.org.uk



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