

Merchants and Monuments

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



St John Timberhill
All Saints
St Stephen
St Peter Mancroft
St Gregory
St John Maddermarket

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Medieval Norwich and its Churches

Welcome to Medieval Norwich: A Fine City. 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, Norwich is celebrated as a major medieval city through its historic churches.

Norwich is a City of Churches. It has a collection of 31 medieval churches, reputedly more than any other 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 c.1550) Norwich was also a very religious city. It has been described as Europe's most religious city during the period with a tradition of anchorites and hermits and a number of informal (and fairly transient) groups of women living together in chastity - in all likelihood influenced by the *béguinages* (establishments housing members of a lay sisterhood) of the Low Countries.



Image: St Gregory



Image: St Stephen

According to the Domesday Book there were between 49 and 54 churches and chapels in Norwich when it was compiled in 1086. Of these at least eight existed before the Norman Conquest but there were possibly many more – up to about 25. 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 by moving the old Saxon market place from Tombland.

By the mid-13th century there were around 60 churches and chapels, after then 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 some of the finest of their type in the country. The

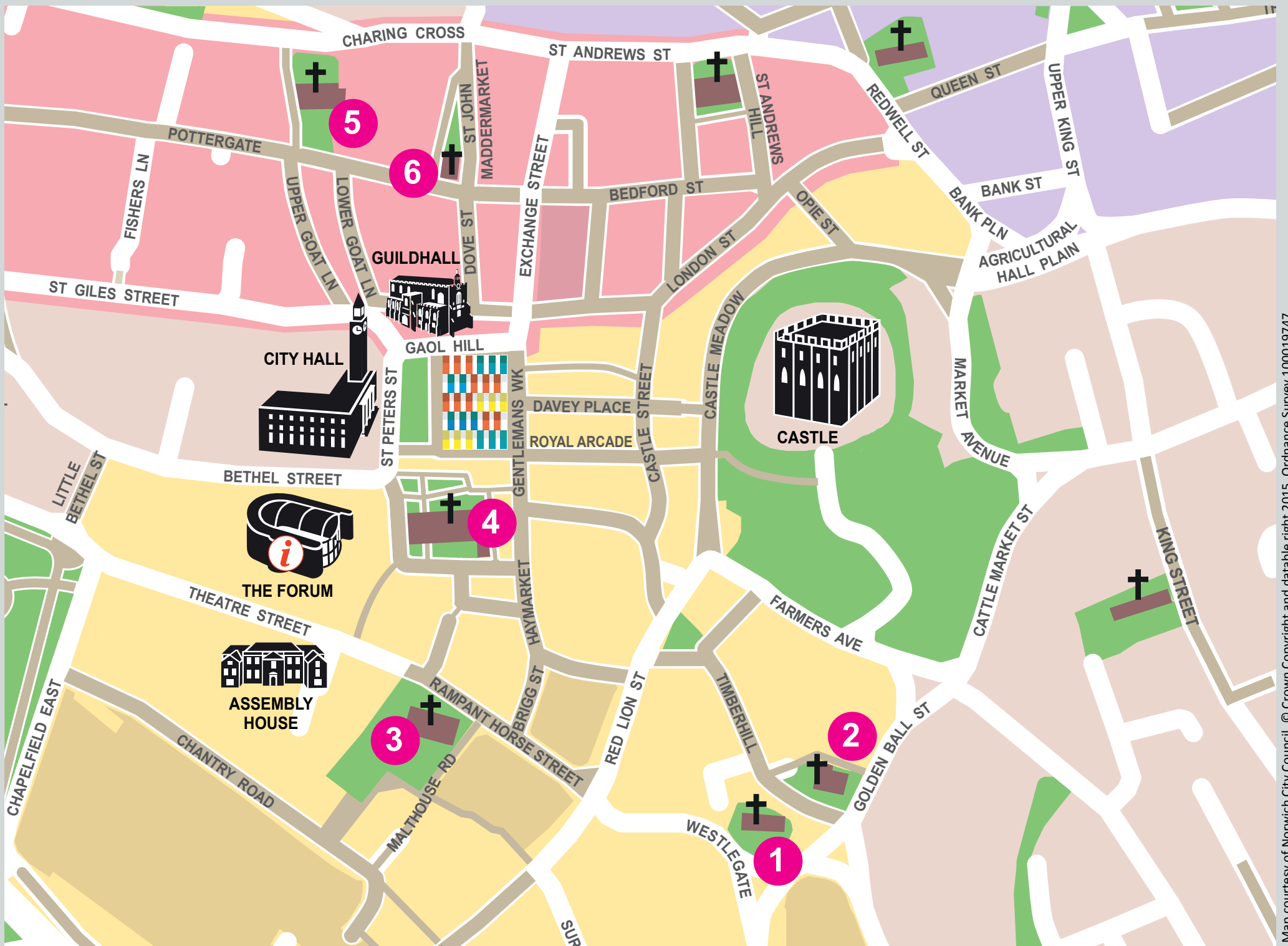
money to pay for the work came from the wealthy citizens of Norwich in donations and bequests left to the church in which they worshipped and were later buried. Several of these citizens became prominent Mayors of Norwich.

In 1502, there were still 46 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 14 churches were also 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 31 medieval churches within the City of Norwich, eight are still in use as places of worship, 18 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



Merchants and Monuments

The trail begins at St John Timberhill, at the junction of Timberhill and All Saints Street.

1 St John Timberhill

Like several of the city's other churches of St John this church is dedicated in honour of John the Baptist and was originally sited just outside the Castle bailey. Timberhill was the open area to the south of the church, where a timber market was once held.

There are indications there was a church here before 1066 but the current building has witnessed many changes; the tower fell in 1784 to be replaced by a wooden bell frame. This in turn was replaced in 1877 by the present turret.

Points of interest:

- the statue of St John the Baptist, to whom the church is dedicated, in the niche above the south entrance.
- the three figures of Our Lord, Our Lady and St John the Beloved Disciple, on the beam above the rood screen were carved in Oberamgau.
- the small plaque to the right of the altar commemorating 'a benefaction' of £200 left in the will of Thomas Clabburn in 1816. The money was to be invested and the interest used to pay for coal and bread for the poor of the parish once a year. There is a similar plaque in the nearby church of All Saints but for £400.

Leaving the church, turn right along All Saints Street to All Saints church on Westlegate.

2 All Saints

The feast of All Saints is kept on 1st November, and is intended to allow for the commemoration of all the redeemed, known and unknown, and has been kept in England since the eighth century.

There is no documentary evidence of when the church was founded but in the later Middle Ages there was a major makeover of the previous building to produce the church we see today. The tower dates from the fifteenth century although the corners were rebuilt in brick during the nineteenth century and the top stage rebuilt in 1913. Today, few original church fittings remain.

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3 St Stephen

Dedicated to St Stephen, a deacon in the early church who was stoned to death for his beliefs, the church has been, like so many of the city's medieval churches, extensively rebuilt. The chancel was reconstructed between 1521 and 1534 and the nave between 1533 and 1550.

Being one of the major city centre churches St Stephen reflects the medieval wealth of Norwich with a fine collection of monuments commemorating wealthy parishioners and benefactors. Recently the churchyard was much altered to provide access to the Chapelfield shopping mall.

Points of interest:

- the glass in the imposing east window with the five figures dating from 1511 which were brought from the Mariawald monastery in Germany.
- the splendid monument on the north wall of the nave to John Mingay, a benefactor who died in 1625. Mingay was an apothecary who lived opposite the church and is commemorated in effigy alongside his wife Susan. They were married for 44 years and had seven children.
- Later, during the eighteenth century St Stephen's was the church of the Noverre family. For a century, Augustin Noverre, his son Francis and his descendants gave dancing lessons at the adjacent Assembly Rooms. The family are commemorated by a floor stone just in front of the altar.

Leave the church, cross Theatre Street and via William Booth Street to the south door of St Peter Mancroft.

4 St Peter Mancroft

The grandest parish church in Norwich. Dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, St Peter Mancroft dominates the upper market area adjoining the City Hall and the Forum. Mancroft probably refers to the large common field that lay to the south of the church.

The church we see today dates from the extensive rebuilding that took place from 1430 to 1455 although it was embellished in the 1890s by the additions of the parapet on the tower and the ornate 'peppercorn' pinnacles. The interior is 180 feet in length, filled with light and contains many treasures

Points of interest:

- the east window contains an extensive collection of fifteenth century Norwich glass with 42 panels containing the stories of Christ, the Virgin, St Peter and John the Evangelist - including on the bottom right is a representation of wealthy Norwich merchant Robert Toppes.
- the tapestry dating from 1573 probably made by Flemish weavers living in Norwich which depicts the Resurrection.
- the monument to Edmund Manning by the north door. Manning was a wealthy nineteenth century coppersmith who left bequests to help poor children obtain apprenticeships in several of the Norwich parishes.
- The chapel of St Nicholas in the north transept which contains part of the remarkable collection of church silver.

Leave by the north door, pass in front of the City Hall to your left, cross St Giles Street to Lower Goat Lane to Pottergate and the church of St Gregory.

5 St Gregory

The church is dedicated in honour of Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome from 590 until 604. He is credited with codifying the melodies used in church services, which is why they are known as 'Gregorian chant'. The nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1394 and together form one of the best medieval interior spaces in Norwich. The aisle windows are known to have been by Robert Wodehirst. This is a rare instance of being able to identify the mason who worked on a parish church.

The crowning glory of St Gregory is the medieval wall paintings that have been recognised as some of the best in

England. That of St George and the Dragon in the north aisle were discovered in 1861 and there are others in the south aisle.

Points of interest:

- the rather grand monument to Sir Peter Seaman tucked away within the organ case. He was a brewer who lived on Westwick Street and owned property in other parts of Norwich.
- beside the organ case is a memorial to Sir Joseph Paine, a wealthy hosier who owned Strangers Hall and was knighted by Charles II in 1660. Paine also became Mayor of Norwich that year.
- the nineteenth century stained glass in the east window, most of which was made by the Norwich firm of J and J King.

Turn left along Pottergate for the short walk to St John, Maddermarket.

6 St John Maddermarket

St John may be one of the churches named in the Domesday Book. Maddermarket is usually understood as the place where the madder root, used to make the red dye for dyeing cloth, was sold, although no evidence has been found of such a market.

Rebuilt in the fifteenth century the clerestory is faced with free stone although the rest of the church is of flint. It contains many ornate monuments.

In September 1876 there was disastrous gas explosion in the church which caused substantial damage to the interior after a gas leak was investigated by someone carrying a lighted taper.

St John was an Anglo-Catholic church which closed in 1982, was then used by the Greek Orthodox Church until 1990 when it passed into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust.

Points of interest:

- the west wall of the churchyard wall where in 1599 William Kemp celebrated dancing from London to Norwich in nine days by jumping over it.

- the baldachin or canopy over the high altar, which was almost certainly the one made for St Michael, Coslany and brought to St John in 1883.
- the church contains many memorials of interest including one to Nugent Monck, founder of the Norwich Players and the Maddermarket Theatre, a churchwarden at the church, who died in 1958.

This is the end of this tour. We do hope you have enjoyed it! Look out for more tours of the city's medieval churches.

Flintspiration

Norwich Medieval Churches
Weekend
(30 April – 1 May 2017)

A medieval-themed celebration:

- live entertainment
- exhibitions
- city trails and tours
- activities for families



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This tour takes approx. 45 minutes to an hour and includes six of the medieval churches in the centre of Norwich including St John, Timberhill and St John, Maddermarket. It also takes in St Peter Mancroft, one of the finest parish churches in the country and nearby St Stephen. Three of these churches are used for religious worship, the other three are repurposed churches. The trail highlights the contribution made to the city's history by its wealthy merchants and how they are commemorated by the often ornate monuments that mark their passing.

St John, Timberhill remains a place of religious worship which is open daily. Also used for religious worship, St Stephen has an emphasis on community activities, including a popular cafe, and is open most days. St Peter Mancroft is similarly a place of religious worship and is open Monday to Saturday. All Saints is an antiques centre/tea room and is open daily. St Gregory is also a popular antiques centre, open every day. Currently St John Maddermarket is open to the public most Thurs 11-2pm. (Check www.visitchurches.org.uk for details).

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 fine city. There is a wealth of literature written about these churches, the people associated with them and the treasures they contain including: 'The Medieval Churches of Norwich' by Nicholas Groves and 'Medieval Norwich', edited by Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson.

This trail supports a city-wide cultural celebration, **Flintspiration:** Norwich Medieval Churches Weekend (30 April – 1 May 2017).

Norwich Historic Churches Trust gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the kind contributions of the following:

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

Norwich Historic Churches Trust

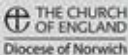
The Norwich Historic Churches Trust (NHCT) was established in 1973. It cares for eighteen Grade 1 listed medieval churches that are no longer used for worship and have been deconsecrated. While most have lost their original fittings, they still house a number of important monuments, tombs and wall paintings. Today, arts and cultural organisations as well as commercial enterprises occupy the NHCT churches. 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 the buildings in our care please contact the Administrator Stella Eglinton at stella.eglinton@norwich-churches.org or Tel: (01603) 611530.

For more information about the Norwich Historic Churches Trust or to learn more about the activities of the Friends of Norwich Historic Churches go to:

www.norwich-churches.org

www.fnhct.org.uk



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