

North of the River

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



St Saviour
St Clement
St George Colegate
St Michael Coslany
St Mary Coslany
St Martin at Oak



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 city north of the Alps, memorials in flint and stone to its rich European 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.

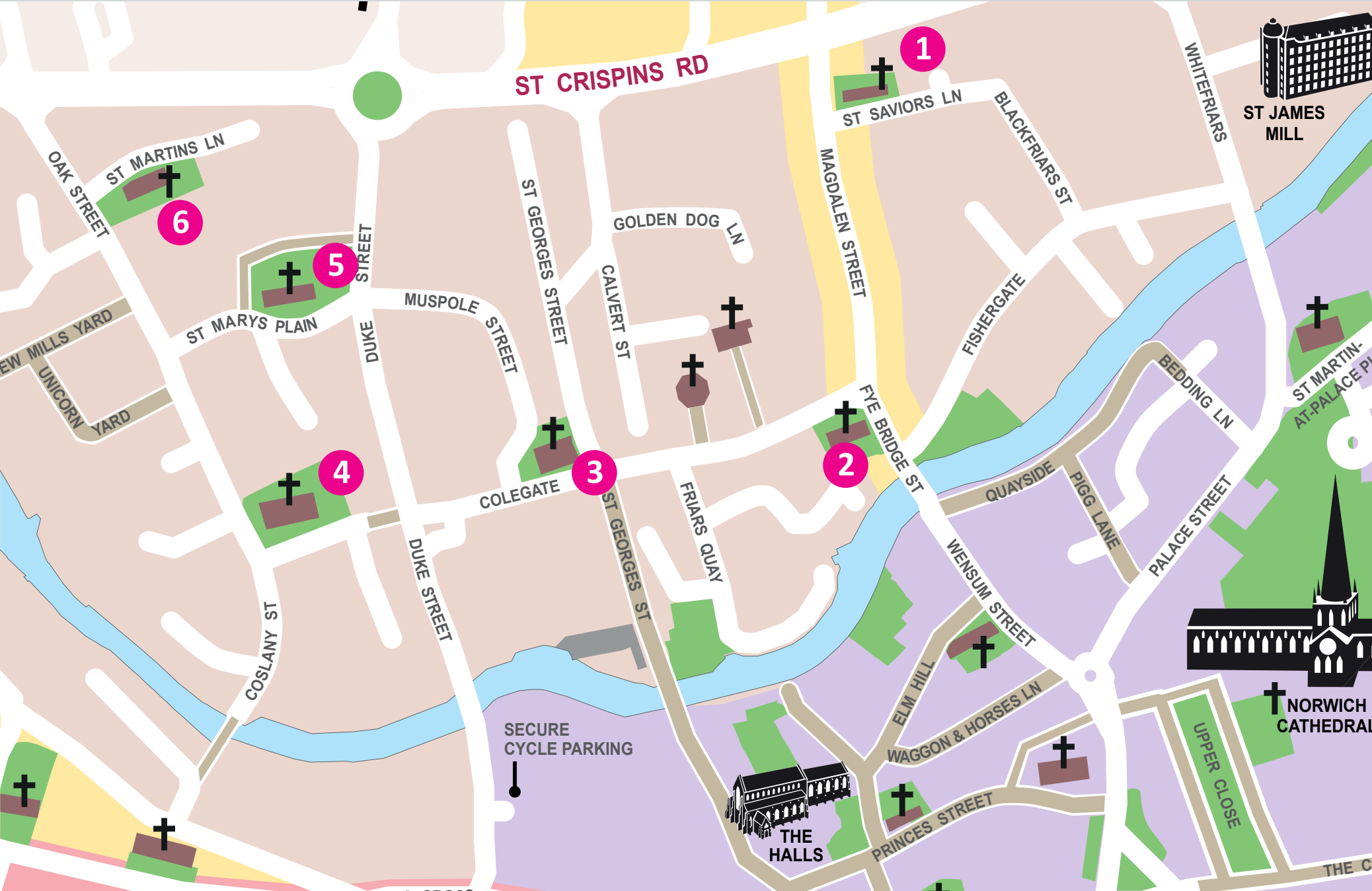
The money to pay for the work came from the wealthy citizens of Norwich in donations and bequests left to the church in which they worshipped and in which they were later buried. Several of these citizens became prominent Mayors of Norwich.

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



North of the River

The trail begins on Magdalen Street by the junction with St Saviour's Lane.

1 St Saviour

There is no saint called Saviour, the name is likely a version of Christ Church. There was almost certainly a Saxon church here. Much of what is visible today dates from the 14th and 15th centuries.

The building's unbalanced appearance is due to loss of the top storey of the tower. This was removed in 1853 when a major restoration took place, including the lowering of the battlements seen today and the restoration of the nave. The south wall of the nave was later rebuilt and supported with brick buttresses.

St Saviour was not a wealthy parish - at one point the bells were sold to pay for repairs to the tower.

The church fittings were dispersed after its closure; none remain. The gallery which stood at the west end is now at All Saints, one of the fonts was taken to St Giles.

Like many of the city's churchyards this is smaller than it originally was - probably reduced for road widening after the churchyards were closed for burials in 1856.

Following closure in 1953, St Saviour was used as a parish hall. It is now used by the Thalia Theatre group.

Points of Interest:

- the chancel windows dating from the 14th century (the chancel is the part furthest from Magdalen Street, adjacent to the car park).
- the headstones in the churchyard have been placed against church walls as in other city churchyards.
- the plaque by the west door is dedicated to Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was born and educated in the nearby parish of St Clement.
- St Saviour was notable for the long incumbency of the Revd. Harris Cooke, 1856 – 1909.

Leaving St Saviour walk south along Magdalen Street to Colegate and the church of St Clement.

2 St Clement

St Clement - stands close to Fye Bridge, one of the earliest river crossing points in Norwich and on the historic major north-south axis (Kings Street/Magdalen Street). St Clement was martyred by being tied to an anchor and thrown into the sea.

Thought to be one of the first churches in Norwich, erected c.1040, it may have been one of the first stone churches although no architectural evidence is visible. The building seen today dates from the 15th century. St Clement is surrounded on all four sides by footways, forming an island site – a tendency marking important churches of Anglo-Saxon foundation.

Declared redundant in the 1960s, St Clement became a centre for private prayer and meditation. Now home of the Guild of St Stephen and St George, Gildencraft Stone Masonry trains apprentice stone masons.

Points of interest:

- the tower clock commemorating the fallen of World War II.
- the elaborate wall monuments and floor slabs commemorating the wealthy Harvey and Ives families: members of the weaving trade who lived nearby. Thomas Harvey lived at no. 18 Colegate.
- the churchyard which is now a beautiful garden.
- the churchyard tomb erected in the 19th century, commemorates the parents of Mathew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury under Elizabeth I.

Leaving the churchyard turn left and walk along Colegate to St George, Colegate.

3 St George Colegate

One of two medieval churches in the city dedicated to St George. Dedications to St George date after the First Crusade of 1096.

The church standing today was built between 1459, when the nave was erected, and 1513, when the south aisle and chancel were built. The north chapel was built later by William Norwich, Mayor in 1461. The style and materials, notably extensive use of stone, indicate the wealth of the parish at that time.

A spacious and elegant Georgian interior flooded with light, it reflects the wealth of successful cloth merchants who attended this church. On the west gallery is an organ, built by George England. When installed in 1802, it was one of the first in a Norwich church.

St Georges is now the only Anglican church north of the river used for religious worship. It is regularly open to the public.

Points of interest:

- the carvings above the entrance of the Annunciation and of St George being armed by angels.
- the pulpit dating from the late 18th century with its elegant staircase, backboard and tester.
- the terracotta monument in the north chapel to Robert Jannys, a wealthy grocer and twice Mayor during the 16th century.
- the memorial to John Crome, parishioner and founder of the Norwich School of Artists.
- many other memorials within the church are worth a look.

Continue along Colegate, crossing Duke Street, to St Michael, Coslany

4 St Michael Coslany

Known as 'St Miles', and dedicated to St Michael the Archangel, this is one of the few churches in Norwich where bell ringing is still practiced. Probably founded as early as the 8th century, stonework here dates from the 11th century. Workmanship dating from the 1490s has been attributed to John Antell who also worked on Norwich Cathedral and possibly on St Martin at Oak and St Andrew. The fine flushwork indicates this was a wealthy parish.

The flushwork on the east end of the chancel was executed as part of a major restoration during the 1880s when the east window was installed. The mason used the medieval flushwork on the south chapel as his template.

Badly affected by the extensive floods in 1912, the church was once four feet deep in water!

St Miles closed in 1971. It was once a gymnasium and recently a science centre for children. Now it is a training centre for circus performers known as The Oak Circus Centre.

Points of interest:

- the impressive flushwork.
- the west door with its angels dates c.1420. The empty niches would have held figures at one time.
- the black and white marble slabs outside the west door came from the Paston chapel, Oxnead. Part of the chancel floor in the 18th century this paving was later moved outside.
- an elaborate monument to Edward Hooke, a barrister who defended the Norwich food rioters of 1766 and a small plaque to Anne Grew who 'died suddenly on the 17th October 1844 while conversing with her husband'. William Grew, a hot presser, worked on Duke Street.

Walk north on Oak Street to St Mary's Plain and St Mary Coslany

5 St Mary Coslany

Originally a Saxon church, it was extensively rebuilt during the 1460s. Like St Clement, it stands on an island site.

St Mary's is one of the few round tower churches in Norwich and possibly the oldest. Although round tower churches are numerous in Norfolk they are difficult to date with certainty. After periods of neglect and closure in the 19th century, the belfry was removed in 1905. It finally closed in 1974. Formerly used a venue for selling art and antiques, it is now occupied by a bookseller.

Points of interest:

- the Caen stone balusters in the tower window date c.1094.
- the plaque to Luke Hansard – apprenticed as a printer in Norwich he later moved to London where he gave his name to the journal of the House of Commons.
- the monument to Peter Finch, a brewer who lived in Oak Street. Finch was Mayor in 1827. His brewery later formed part of Steward and Patteson.
- the arch braced roof, repaired in 1906, and again in 1942, is original. The arches meet at a gilded boss of the Assumption of the Virgin, surrounded by angels.

Continue north on Oak Street to our last church St Martin at Oak.

6 St Martin at Oak

Dedicated to St Martin, the 4th century Bishop of Tours, who reputedly cut his cloak to clothe a beggar, an oak tree once stood in the churchyard. In the Middle Ages this housed an image of the Virgin Mary. It was later removed during the Reformation.

The current church dates from the 15th century. The chancel was complete by 1441 and the aisle by 1491 - the mason of the latter may have been John Antell who worked on other churches of the period.

In the 19th century St Martin flourished but in 1835 a proposal was made to demolish and rebuild. Although not fully realized, the chancel was rebuilt in 1852.

Postwar it became a parish hall - the chancel was blocked off and side rooms installed. Home of the Norwich Night Shelter for over 25 years, it houses an award winning music school, The Wharf Academy.

Points of interest:

- the truncated tower is due to war time bombing. Later rebuilt, it was crowned with stonework from the battlemented top.
- the stair turrets to the right of the west door – turn left for the tower and right for the south porch.
- the fleur de lys glass in the chancel north window allows you to look out but not in.
- the monument to Thomas Newton, a beer brewer and Mayor of Norwich in 1722.

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

North of the River

This tour takes about 45 minutes to an hour and includes six medieval churches north of the river Wensum including two in Magdalen Street - St Saviour and St Clement and others in Oak Street. It also includes St George Colegate which is the sole church north of the river still used for religious worship. The trail highlights not only the splendid buildings but some of the modern cultural uses for which they have become well-loved.

Traditionally Norwich north of the river had its own identity – it was a bustling, densely populated urban area that was home to the city's traditional industries such as weaving and shoe making. It was served by many churches – some of which, including St Margaret in Combusto at the north end of Magdalen Street where hanged criminals were buried, no longer exist.

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, and 'Medieval Norwich', edited by Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson.

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:
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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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