

## Richard Hanage

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**From:** Friends of York Walls <richard@hanage.com>  
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**To:** richard@hanage.com  
**Subject:** [SPAM]Friends of York Walls Newsletter - Jan 2020

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# Friends of York Walls Newsletter

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#### Oops: Previous version sent out with wrong subject header. Apologies.

**Open Days:** Sat/Sun 25/26 Jan: Residents Weekend;

Sat 22 Feb: Viking weekend

**Committee:** Tues 7 Jan; Tues 4th Feb

**Contents:** Welcome to 2020 ..... Volunteer Co-ordinator ..... Come Cleaning? .... 2020 Openings and Brochure .... Reflections on Early Years .... Incendiary Damaged Tower? ..... Walls Video .... Flower of the Mont

## Welcome to our first newsletter of 2020!

We had a great year in 2019, with new displays and very high visitor numbers, and plan to keep on developing the Postern Tower in 2020 as well as organising other events, such as the York Walls Festival (15/16 August). However, we do urgently need someone to step forward and help co-ordinate our volunteers.

## Volunteer Co-ordinator Still Needed

Martin has stepped down as coordinator of volunteers, so we need a replacement. The role can be shared - indeed, Sam will assist by sending emails to the volunteers and looking after the [volunteer log](#).

The tasks we need help with are:

- Help to induct new volunteers at the FPT with support from the FoYW Committee and other experienced volunteers.
- Complete the opening-up and/or closing-up checklist if volunteering at that time.

Please email [friendsofyorkwalls@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofyorkwalls@gmail.com) if you would like to know more.

## Please Come and Clean with Us!

On Saturday 18th Jan we plan to be at the FPT at 10am, for an hour or so, for a merry (?) clean-up in preparation for Residents Weekend. We would love to see any friends who would like to meet us there and take part. We usually repair to a nearby pub afterwards. Cleaning equipment provided.

## 2020 Open Days and Brochure

The list of planned open days for 2020 is available [here](#)

Volunteers (and friends) please sign up to help [here](#)

We are just finalising the **2020 brochure** and the latest draft (almost ready) is available to download [here](#). If you would like one or more hard copies of the final version, please email your postal address, and how many you would like, to me at [richard@hanage.com](mailto:richard@hanage.com)

## Friends of York Walls - Reflecting on the Early Years

(Alan Fleming)

As we start a new year and look forward to another season we also take time to reflect on the early years of the Friends of York Walls, and to remember Chris Dowell – a founder member and Trustee of FOYW. It was with the greatest sadness that we reported the death of Christine (Chris) Dowell - who passed away on Tuesday, September 24th 2019. She died peacefully at home following a brave journey with motor neurone disease. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, wisdom and guidance will remain with us all.

The idea to form The Friends of York Walls was first suggested about ten years ago, when a small group of York's Residents, including Keith Myers and Chris and John Dowell started talking to City of York Council and City Archaeologist John Oxley about the idea of forming a Friends Group to promote the city walls. As things took off John Oxley suggested that the new group could perhaps use the empty and disused Fishergate Postern Tower as a base. In late 2010 he took a small group inside a rather dark, damp and dusty Fishergate Postern Tower for the very first time.

By the end of 2010 things had advanced sufficiently to consider holding a public meeting which took place on 28th February 2011. The first Friends of York Walls committee was formed with Keith Myers as chairman, Chris Dowell as secretary, John Dowell as publicity & membership secretary and Lindsay Clarke as treasurer. The "FOYW management committee" have seen many people come and go since then, but have still met monthly ever since.



### Presentation of the first stone to the Lord Mayor January 2012

In the early years one of the main objectives was to increase public awareness, support and membership. It was decided to start opening Fishergate Postern Tower to the public at selected weekends throughout the year. Chris and John Dowell became the driving force in the early years of opening FPT, and they would attend regular open days for the whole of the day. Chris had a great knack of getting the wary public to enter the dark damp tower and to have a free look around. A short history lesson was often also provided. To increase the public awareness of FOYW a number of "information stalls" were tried in Parliament Street, The Designer Outlet, at Rowntree Park, etc., and Chris and John would always be there.



### Lord Mayors Walls Inspection March 2012

By the beginning of 2012 things were really getting going and that year saw a large number of events often organised by Chris and John. The year started with the now annual York Residents Weekend FPT openings and the launch of "Sponsor a Stone" with a presentation to the Lord Mayor. At committee meetings it was suggested that FOYW should start more annual walls related traditions and in March Chris was seen organising daffodil waving schoolchildren along Lord Mayors Walk as part of a "A Lord Mayors Walls Inspection". In April, to mark St Georges

Day, there was a costume parade from FPT to The Eye of York - complete with large dragon, knights in armour, a Scotsman bagpiper, sword play and an enacted St George slaying the dragon tableau. Chris again entered into the spirit of the event with her usual enthusiasm and organising skills. In July a Summer Fair was held outside Red Tower, which at that time was still closed to the public. One of the summer fair activities was to be a dog show which Chris finished up compering and judging. The Red Tower Fair, a Tofts Tower fair, and one outside Kings Manor (for the Lord Mayors Charities) were great fun but never made any great money.



St George and the Dragon Parade April 2012



In October of 2012 Chris and John helped to organise a coach trip to Chester to see their Roman Walls. Chris entertained us on the way back with a quiz and a raffle. "The wheels on the bus go round and round ....". All these activities were taking place alongside regular Postern Tower openings mainly managed by Chris and John.





Visit to Chester October 2012



In January 2013, in an attempt to raise further awareness and funds, an "East Meets West" concert was organised in St Helen's Church, Stonegate. Music and dance performers from York St John and York Universities took part, and also Ebor Morris. The Lord Mayor attended and a good time was had by all. Chris ran the raffle and thanked the Master of Ceremonies and all the performers on behalf of FOYW. Regular Postern Tower openings, and other events, continued throughout the year.

At the end of October 2013 FOYW opened the Bootham Bar to Monk Bar walls section as a "Walk in the Dark" to coincide with a York's Festival of Light event. However by the end of 2013 Chris and John were finding that their attendance at the regular open days at FPT and other activities was getting very demanding and their deteriorating health meant that they could no longer get up the FPT spiral staircase, and stand for long periods. They started to take a less active role but continued to support the committee, and acted as trustees, until they were eventually no longer able to attend meeting, etc..



Since then FOYW has gone on to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (November 2014), to acquire a 30 year lease at FPT (November 2016), and has held a number of successful events and Walls Festivals (2018 & 2019). We will however always remember Chris Dowell, and John, for the hard work and dedication that they gave to FOYW, particularly in the early years. They were an inspiration to us all.

In memory of Chris Dowell 1938 - 2019 a founder member, supporter, first committee secretary and a trustee of the Friends of York Walls. Rest in peace Chris.

## **Incendiary Bomb Damaged Tower? (Simon Mattam)**



*St Mary's Abbey: Tower D - Photo: Simon Mattam*

Have you heard, or can you lead me to, evidence on - how the stone here became pink and cracked?

'Here' is the inside of the tower closest to the back of the Art Gallery. Officially it is Tower D in the medieval defensive wall around St Mary's Abbey. This winter it was declared in danger of collapse so supportive scaffolding has been put up, along with big boards to keep people from danger. All this ruins the view of the tower so an explanatory notice was needed; helping with this revived my interest in how the stone got damaged.

The only story I've heard is that the tower was scorched by incendiary bombs during York's big air raid in April 1942. This may be true but many long-established tourist guides have not heard the story and all the bombing in that raid seems to have been carefully recorded at the time, the only incident that might have been tower-scorching seems to be a fire after an incendiary bomb hit 'Exhibition Bldgs'. The name 'Exhibition Buildings' was sometimes used around that time to refer to what is now the Art Gallery. Perhaps inflammable stuff was stacked in that tower -but if the buildings were as they are now this seems an odd way of referring to a fire that scorched that bit of the abbey's wall so thoroughly and left the closer bits by the side of the Gallery undamaged.

I have been told that the story was used to explain the need for Council repairs on the abbey's wall here in November 1997 but I've not been able to check this yet and haven't found any mention of it in books. Please contact me if you can help in any way, I think it would be sad if such a recent bit of history was lost to us.

Simon Mattam [ps.mattam@outlook.com](mailto:ps.mattam@outlook.com)

## **Building a legacy?** (Simon Mattam)

Do you remember the silent video, 'The Walls in 14 minutes', from last year's Walls' Festival? There was a reminder in November's e-news and you can still see it on YouTube: [The Walls in 14 minutes](#)

I wonder if we could build on it to make something of lasting usefulness. Baz Jones, who made it, is willing, but have you the ideas and/or time to help with this project?

It seems to me that we'll have to decide on a use or uses - to interest people who can't walk up on the Walls? or people who are deciding whether to walk up on them or on certain parts of them? - to help people notice or understand better what is there?

With a use in mind we can consider cuts and additions, slow downs and speed ups, oral commentary and captions.

Perhaps what we create could be shown on the ground floor of FPT [we have tablets to do this], Perhaps it could be on our website, or clearly linked to it?

Please send thoughts on this, including offers of help, to [ps.mattam@outlook.com](mailto:ps.mattam@outlook.com)

## **Rampart Flower of the Month** (Simon Mattam)





*Shepherd's purse by Fishergate Bar' - Photo: Simon Mattam*

The conjoined-twin mid-winter months' flower is shepherd's purse, AKA 'pickpocket' or 'mothers' hearts'.

This tough little plant can be found in flower almost any time of year, this photo was taken in mid-December. The plant has travelled the world with the earliest farmers because it likes disturbed ground. As the theme of York's next Viking Festival is Viking voyages, it is worth noting that Shepherd's purse is still found around the old Viking settlements in Greenland so it seems it doesn't need regular disturbance but it likes it because its seeds are particularly long-lived and spring into full life when bathed in light.

Its seed pods are heart-shaped and, when mature, they suddenly split in two and spill out the seeds -there are records of a cruel game where children were invited to pick the pods, when the inevitable happened they were told 'you'll break your mother's heart'.

The seeds that spill out look a little like tiny pennies so the pods, attached to the plant by a thin stem from the point of the heart, reminded medieval people of a simple purse closed by a tie and hanging from a belt. This is why its common name is 'shepherd's purse' in several European languages. Even its full botanical 'Latin' name translates as 'little box, shepherd's purse'.

Herbalists valued it, drying the whole plant and making tea from it to reduce internal and external bleeding of all sorts. More weirdly, Culpepper also thought it could cure 'yellow jaundice' if bunches were placed on the wrists or on the soles of the feet -and he recommended putting the juice of it in noisy, painful ears. Early in the year it was also eaten as food, modern writers speak

of an unpleasant smell and biting taste but say that when boiled it is like a milder, softer cabbage.

This completes a year of Rampart Flower of the month features in this e-news each matching an interpreted display of the picked flowers at Fishergate Postern Tower on open days there. Each feature invited 'offers of help with increasing people's enjoyment of nature on the ramparts' but I've had no offers and only a few signs of interest so what is planned for the rest of 2020 is just an occasional nature feature.

The heritage open days theme for this year [mid-September] is hidden nature -perhaps, following Julian's story in the last e-news, we should feature FPT's spiders -and an arachnophile will appear to take the lead on this.

In the mean time, as a taster of looser arrangements for featuring nature during the rest of this year, here is another photo I took in the middle of last month.



*Wood blewit [?] opposite the Barbican' - Photo: Simon Mattam*

I've not got the focus quite right and I'm showing evidence of my scrabbling lack of respect for the mycelium that produced this beautiful fruiting body but otherwise I really like this photo -and I was delighted by my find. My dad told me that mushrooms like these [also called 'blue legs' - but there was only the slightest violet sheen on the stalk and gills of these ones by the ramparts] were sold [as food] in markets near Hebden Bridge in the 1930s. They grow from decaying leaves in late Autumn but, possibly increasingly with climate change, are still to be found in the winter. They are fairly common today but presumably would have been much commoner when the Walls were built because there would have been so many more deciduous trees then [though probably not right by the ramparts].

Simon Mattam [ps.mattam@outlook.com](mailto:ps.mattam@outlook.com)

Richard Hanage ([richard@hanage.com](mailto:richard@hanage.com))

Editor, on behalf of the FoYW committee.

Glen McGowan	Chair
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Penny Heptonstall	Treasurer
Sam McDermott	Secretary
Alan Fleming	Website
Bill Hill	Fund-raising
Guy Newton	
Martin Hetherington	
Simon Mattam	

The committee may be contacted at [friendsofyorkwalls@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofyorkwalls@gmail.com)

If you would like to attend a committee meeting, please contact Sam McDermott.

The meetings are normally on the first Tuesday of the month.

The 'Friends of York Walls' is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation representing York's walls & defences. Registered Charity: No. 1159300 [www.yorkwalls.org.uk](http://www.yorkwalls.org.uk)

Postern Tower location: YO1 9AF (please do not send mail here - no letterbox!)



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