

Richard Hanage

From: Friends of York Walls <richard@hanage.com>
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Friends of York Walls Newsletter - May 2020

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Friends of York Walls Newsletter

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Open Days: **Cancelled until further notice**

Annual Friends Meeting: **Cancelled**

Committee: **On-line only**

Contents: Coronavirus Update Simon Perry How to Open? New Book Virtual Open Day York Walls Festival Refurbishing Roof A Tragic Tale More Ferns on the Walls

Coronavirus Update

We are sorry to say that the Fishergate Postern Tower (FPT) will still remain closed until further notice. Given the uncertainty we are all facing, we don't yet know when we will reopen. However, you can keep in touch on the [WEBSITE](#), and through our social media channels on [TWITTER](#) and [FACEBOOK](#)

For the time being, stay safe and take care. The Friends of York Walls.

Simon Perry (Bill Hill)

We have received the sad news that Simon Perry of the Red Tower York CIC died recently from a heart condition.

Simon was very valued colleague to the Friends of York Walls, collaborating with us on our joint heritage interests, in particular on the Festival of the Walls and our joint open days, as can be seen in these pictures.



Simon Perry attending York Walls Festival events - Photos: Lewis Outing

He was the motivating force behind the Walmgate Community Association, and then became a lead director of the Red Tower York CIC. He was actively involved in the steps to secure funding for the internal restoration of the Red Tower, and then helping it to become a "heritage venue with a purpose" viz a focus for the community and visitors in general.

He will be missed by us all.

[See the Red Tower tribute](#) [See York Press article](#)

How and When Might We Open? (Bill Hill)

We are beginning to think about how and when we might re-open the Fishergate Postern Tower for visitors. It is not the easiest building to operate while maintaining physical distance between people, and we are committed to staying within government guidelines, which will no doubt evolve, but some early ideas include:

- a) Providing volunteers with masks and disposable gloves.
- b) Limiting the number of visiting groups in the building at any one time, perhaps to one per floor, and then managing the traffic up and down the stairs so that physical distancing is maintained.
- c) Providing visitors with disposable gloves so that they can still safely get hold of the rope on the stairs and touch the walls to help balance.

We also need to take account of any action the Council may take in re-opening the walls. Louisa Hood is exploring the idea of opening sections on a trial basis using a one-way system, but details and arrangements for marshalling are still at an early stage.

We are going to take stock each month as the national advice and local practice unfold, but for the moment we are staying closed.

'York – A Rare Insight' (Richard Hanage)

I have just bought the book 'York - A Rare Insight' by Ian Drake and Paul Chrystal (YAYAS), which is based on photos in the Evelyn collection. The book is very interesting, and includes a great picture of the Postern Tower.

Hargrove adds: 'I am told that concerts of music and dancing used formerly to be in Fishergate Postern and there have been music galleries in the upper rooms.'

The pub, in Piccadilly, is the Postern Gate.



From 'York - a Rare Insight', by kind permission of the publishers - 'DestinWorld Publishing'

The book has an interesting quote from William Hargrove (1818) about the FPT music gallery:

"..... a flight of winding stairs leads to the top - about halfway up there is another room, with other conveniences, and at one end of it a curious gallery in the form of the music gallery of a modern assembly room. It is railed round and entered by a door above, from the winding staircase. I am told that concerts and dancing used formerly to be in Fishergate Postern and there have been music galleries in the upper rooms."

This is the publishers description of the book:

We'd like to introduce a new book, York – A Rare Insight, by Ian Drake and Paul Chrystal, which features hundreds of historic and rare images from the Evelyn Collection. The Evelyn Collection has been in the safekeeping of the Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society (YAYAS) and offers a glimpse of the unique and unequalled heritage of the City of York.

Illustrating all aspects of York life, its buildings, industry and heritage rarely, if ever, seen before, this book features a wide selection of images from the Collection which are published for the first time. Written by two council members of the YAYAS, the images are part of an important and unique contribution to the social history of York, Yorkshire and England.

Virtual Open Day (Martin Hetherington)

On Saturday, April 18, there was a virtual open day for e-News readers and our volunteers. The content is still available [here](#) and includes great pictures of the 2018 Sheriffs Inspection by Lewis Outing:



Sheriff's Army 2018 - Photo: Lewis Outing

For more pictures from Lewis [click here](#).

We were looking to do another virtual open day on 23 May - but that is not certain yet.

York Walls Festival (Martin Hetherington)

Like all groups organising events this summer, we are faced with the realism that ordinary life will be on hold for many months. The new Covid guidance holds out hope of the festival being possible, but it will need a lot of thinking about how it can be done.

Refurbishing the FPT Roof (Bill Hill)

As we have previously reported, Glen McGowan has been steadily working up proposals for refurbishing the roof of Fishergate Postern Tower, in particular a scheme to remove and then restore the tiles to ensure continuing waterproofing of the building.

A drone survey of the outside of the roof has been undertaken, which has revealed *inter alia* that there are substantial amounts of moss on the side away from the sun, next to the tree, adding to the weight on the roof. This will have to be cleaned off using an appropriate technique as part of the overall job. Glen has gone out to specialist approved contractors for quotes to provide the scaffold and remove and then replace the roof tiles. The cost is coming in at up to £30K including VAT.

We are working closely with the Council, including which organisation might best lead on procuring the work, which will dictate whether the contract is liable for VAT.

The Council have earmarked an initial £20k for the work, so as things stand there is a shortfall, and we are working with them on how to bridge the gap. Clearly if the funding can be

identified early so that the work can be done while the tower is closed, there will be distinct advantages. More anon.

"Tragedy at The Postern" (Julian Crabb)

Dear reader, the story below is mine, and entirely fictitious, but 'Stay Safe!'

Once upon a time there lived a family at Fishergate Postern Tower in York, father, mother and two children. The boy was called Richard, after his grandfather but he was always known as Dick. The sister, who was younger, was called Rose. Father was the gatekeeper and was responsible for the upkeep of the postern and for collecting food taxes before traders entered the city. Most of these lived in the hamlet of Fulford but some came from Barlby and Selby.

The postern was the last of seven built into the imposing city walls and guarded the south side of the city. From the ramparts one could see both rivers, the smaller Foss below and sometimes surrounding the tower and the larger Ouse. They joined up south of the tower so any vessels coming up or downstream could be seen and their intentions noted. Were they marauders? Were they carrying goods that needed to be taxed upstream into the city? A quick message by foot to the watchman at Davy Tower and the great chain across the Ouse could be rapidly raised

Father rose in the very early morning to raise the portcullis in the arch of the gateway into the city. Then he descended the steps to attend to the jostling throng outside, anxious to get their goods into the Thursday market. They brought mainly fruit and vegetables but animals had to be slaughtered and pigs were herded along the long lane to the Shambles..... [read more](#)

Ferns on the Walls - Part 2 (Simon Mattam)



Bracken in the ramparts by Nunnery Lane car park - Photo: Simon Mattam

This article isn't what I said last month that I hoped to deliver, because we are still excluded from the Roman Walls at the back of the Library, where I've seen Maidenhair Spleenwort, and a survey of three north facing sections of Walls during my permitted exercise found none of it.

Instead I can report that the hart's tongue I photographed for last month is still green, in spite of the drought; it is shaded by a great London Plane tree growing in the mini-moat just east of tower 5 [half-hexagon shaped, close to Victoria Bar].



Bracken 'fiddle heads' on the eve of May Day by Micklegate Bar' - Photo: Simon Mattam

This month's new ferns, unlike the hart's tongue, die back in the winter and only show their green again in the Spring. My second photo of bracken, with Micklegate Bar palely in the background makes this clearest - with the little curled fists of fern-to-be pushing up through the rough, light brown mat of last year's fallen stems and fronds.

Bracken is our only fern with branched stems and apparently it has a claim to be currently the Earth's commonest plant. It has been around quite a long time too, the coast near Scarborough is good for finding fern fossils from about 150 million years ago but according to the Woodland Trust the oldest fossil bracken is a mere 55 million years old.

Interesting Names

It grows to about human height in great forests of fern over the moors. You can push your way through it fairly easily but I was pleased to discover that its name, probably brought to us by Angles or Vikings, is linked to its 'braking' action on anyone pushing through. Their young shoots with their tight-curved ends still unfurled have their own name, 'fiddle heads', which I think is OK as long as we hold the image of a cheery battered folk fiddle in our heads, rather than the precious polished elegance of an orchestra violin.

Edible?

These fiddle heads are widely eaten but there is a shadow over bracken; it is reliably linked to cancer, so eating, or even a lot of contact and breathing in of spores, perhaps should be avoided. This is probably unrelated to the way its fiddle heads produce a type of cyanide in defending themselves against predators. That is, if vegetarian foragers can be called 'predators'.

Bracken is so common a fern that confusion can be caused by the two terms being used interchangeably - this may mean I'll never know which fern spores were used to make people invisible [though perhaps I shouldn't reveal this anyway at times of 'social

distancing']. Shakespeare has a boastful character who declares he has the recipe so can walk invisible, but his sceptical companion suspects he only manages such 'invisibility' in the dark.

A Mystery



Mystery deciduous fern in city walls above Jewbury - Photo: Simon Mattam

My final photo is of a bit of a mystery. It was taken at the end of April on the outside of the Walls just south of New Tower above Jewbury - I was conscious that my only acceptable reason for being there was that I was taking exercise so that consciousness, that troubled conscience, is my excuse for not examining it closely enough to say what fern it was. Perhaps I'll be able to go back when its spring shoots are maturer and have clear sori [see last month's 'Ferns on the Walls'] to help identify it - some sort of shield fern or buckler fern, I suspect - both, I think, named for the fact that their sori look like little round shields.

Richard Hanage (richard@hanage.com)

Editor, on behalf of the FoYW committee.

Bill Hill - Chair

Penny Heptonstall - Treasurer

Sam McDermott - Secretary

Alan Fleming - Website

Glen McGowan - Committee member

Simon Mattam - Committee member

Martin Hetherington - Committee member

The committee may be contacted at 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

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



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