

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

Friends of York Walls Newsletter - June 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**

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Coronavirus Update

We are sorry to say that the Fishergate Postern Tower (FPT) is still closed and will remain so until further notice. Given the uncertainty we are all facing, we cannot make firm plans to reopen yet. 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.

How and When Might We Open? (Bill Hill)

We are beginning to think about how we can open. We may be able to carry out a couple of trial openings in July to check our plans and should be able to tell you more in the July newsletter.

Virtual Open Days (Martin Hetherington)

In the meantime we have been running 'virtual open days' and the most recent was on Saturday 20th June. It featured Tower 39 (Fishergate Corner Tower). [See more here](#). You can also have a look at the Virtual Open Days section of the [FoYW website](#).

York Walls Festival (Martin Hetherington)

Festival plans have been advancing slowly, and the events page on the website has been updated recently: <http://yorkwallsfestival.org/planned-events>. Baz is working on a video with the River Foss Society and details of other planned talks and events should become clearer in the coming weeks. More news in the July e-News.

Repointing Trial in the FPT (Bill Hill)

In the FPT there are several areas where modern cement mortar has been used for repairs and this is known to be one of the contributors to the erosion or 'spalling' evident on many of the stones in the tower. We hope to replace the cement mortar with lime mortar with the help of university students on work experience and other volunteers, including Friends, to help out with the process.

Lime mortars for pointing are softer and more porous than cement mortar and therefore allow moisture to evaporate from the joints more freely. This can lower moisture levels in the masonry and reduce the build-up of soluble salts, thereby reducing potential spalling of the stone-work.

The first step was to do a trial repointing. Louisa Hood (CYC City Walls Manager) arranged for two of the Council's stonemasons, Steve and Sean, to work for a day to test out how possible it was to remove the modern cement without damage to the host stones. They made initial cuts in the cement with a thin grinding disc and then used hand tools to lever out the remainder.



Louisa Hood with Steve Widdowson, Stonemason in Charge – Photo: Baz Jones



Before trial: showing cement mortar – Photo: Baz Jones



During trial: cement mortar chipped out – Photo: Baz Jones

The findings of this first stage of the trial were very positive:

- It is possible to remove the modern cement using this approach without damage.
- The modern cement is only about 2" deep, after which the original lime mortar is exposed. This seems to be in good condition.
- The team of two, working all day, completed about two-thirds of the south wall of the ground floor. This will enable Louisa to make a well-informed estimate of the time it will take to do the whole interior of the building, and hence the cost.
- Stonemason in Charge Steve Widdowson is happy, on the basis of this trial, to allow the university students, and other volunteers, to help out with the process.

The excavated joints have now been repointed with lime mortar, which has an aesthetic appeal in itself, as well as its other merits outlined above.

We are holding a site meeting in early July to review the lessons from the trial and plan the way forward. More pictures and details in the July Newsletter.

Consultation: Virtual Tours of the FPT (Simon Mattam)

For some years FoYW has intended to use modern technology to help those unable to climb the stairs to experience more of Fishergate Postern Tower. Then, this spring, almost out of the blue, Alan Fleming presented a free gift/sample of Jonathan Mallory's work with his new all-round camera.



Virtual Tour: FPT entrance (with hotspot on door) - Photo: Jonathan Mallory

This free sample is what we currently call our 'virtual tour' of the tower. Please find this 'tour' on our website and try it, because we urgently need your thoughts on what it should develop into. See it [HERE](#)



Virtual Tour: Ground Floor (with hotspot at stairs) - Photo: Jonathan Mallory

Cost?

Jonathan has told us he is interested in this project so will do it at a specially low price. Bill Hill thinks we can use our existing 'lottery money' - so magically multiplying the value of FoYW spending on the project.

What extras?

We [including Jonathan!] are still finding out exactly what extras are possible, what sort of flesh can be put on the bare bones of the present 'tour'. Flesh is what I originally had in mind - it's possible to have a type of 'hot spot' placed on some item in an existing image in the tower [eg. a mason's mark or the archaeology cabinet] so that clicking on it would lead to information and clearer more detailed images of the item. But which 'items' should we treat in this way? If you have done guiding/guarding at the tower, what items interest you and/or visitors so should be treated this way in a virtual tour?

Should we aim to do more than give clearer images of some 'items' and a little information about them? Jonathan says he can manage videos, images or audio files with different symbols for different types of hotspots; interactive questions might be possible.

What changes?

Some might think the skeleton itself needs attention; after all, the floors had not been prepared for an open day before the photographing and Jonathan was placing his camera without checking where we'd like it located.

I mentioned that some have long wanted a video for non-stair-climbers but perhaps we should also consider what's best for those who will never come to York or those who will not want to enter the tower for fear of infection.

We should remember that the old technology of an illustrated booklet can be interesting and informative so this virtual tour doesn't have to do everything - but I THINK the present virtual tour is too tantalising to be just left as it is. I THINK it gives glimpses of views and displays with such little detail, direction or explanation that, at the moment, it is unsatisfying.

Please send in your thoughts to Simon Mattam ps.mattam@outlook.com by Sunday 28th June.

Follow us on Twitter

For the most up-to-date news please follow us on Twitter. Examples of recent posts:



YorkWallsFriend @YorkWallsFriend · 11 Jun

Yes indeed. In the [@KeystonesYork](#) garden is a path to the Ice House. There's a photo by [@YorkGeorgianSoc](#) here: twitter.com/YorkGeorgianSo... #York #Ice #heritage



York Mansion House @YorkMansionHse · 10 Jun

Replying to @crookedtrailbr1

Yes! There is a surviving Georgian Ice House in the York walls (which we're sure [@YorkWallsFriend](#) will know more about!). We don't know for sure but we also think there was an Ice House in the courtyard at the back of the Mansion House. 💡

↻ YorkWallsFriend Retweeted



RedTowerYork @RedTowerYork1 · 9 Jun

Mad Alice left her passageway in Low Petergate to pop down to the Red Tower today. Famous in York for her 'Bloody Tour of York' she is producing a video of the most gruesome features of the York Bar Walls and the Red Tower murder was a stand out feature to be included in her film



Bloody Tour of York (Mad Alice)

As mentioned in the above tweet, Mad Alice is producing a video tour of York Walls. The first episode is now on YouTube. Each episode is available on Mondays at 7pm onwards.

[Click here](#) for the first episode

See more on [Mad Alices's website](#)

Ferns and More on the Walls (Simon Mattam)



Ferny, flowery Roman walls behind the library - Photo: Simon Mattam

I was tempted to add to my title '- and less on the ramparts' because when I went out with my camera on the 8th of June I found the ramparts newly shorn of all their flowers. The mowing seemed to have been finished with strimming right up to the walls. Even last month's mystery fern seemed to have been strimmed so its name remains a mystery.

Low growing flowers may have escaped the cut but these seemed now buried in what didn't escape.



Mown ramparts at Jewbury - Photo: Simon Mattam

When I asked what the aim was, CYC said the mowing regime had been the same for many years, I am trying to find out more. Our Walls Manager says some parts of the ramparts are already managed as meadows; last year I think this was just by Queen's Street. I'd like experimental 'neglect'.

Danger in the walls?

Above the mown ramparts by Jewbury, high out of reach where the top of a buttress meets the walls, is a bit of nature we probably do need to keep under control. There, beside three varieties of probably-harmless ferns is a tree. It would be splendid if its restricted opportunities for growth had made it into a natural bonzai but it seemed almost man-height and doing well in a fight for space with the wall.



Hart's tongue, wall rue, buckler fern and a tree! - Photo: Simon Mattam

Of course, if, as in some other places, the buttress is slipping down the ramparts and so no longer

supporting the wall, then the tree could be just doing the masons' job of filling the gap between the two.

Beautiful medicine plant?

I think the plant close beside the possible buckler fern at the buttress-top is a fox glove. I think this partly because two fox gloves are in beautiful, if stunted, flower a few metres away on tower 33, the first of two old towers where the wall-walk goes down to Layerthorpe.



Foxgloves high in the walls of Tower 33 - Photo: Simon Mattam

One of the best-known scientific medicine plants, a late 18th century study of the plant established it had an effect on the heart; today you can find it called a stimulant but I've read that it actually slows the heart into a more effective pumping rhythm. Its chemicals have been used to treat high blood pressure and heart attacks but I should avoid self-medicating with it! All parts of it are probably best thought of as poisonous to people and animals -though bees like its plentiful pollen. 'Fox glove' is a very old name, foxes were said to use its bells on their paws to avoid detection.

Maidenhair spleenwort

This lovely little wall-fern is featured in the first of my four photos, and please don't miss the inside of the multangular tower artistically shown in the background! It had a sort of trailer in the April e-news letter which was the first to feature ferns; I couldn't find it for the May edition but on the 8th of June I was lucky enough to find the gates to the left of the main York library open. This, and the permission of a kindly grass-cutter there, let me get to the Roman walls beside and behind the library and in these walls, along with many flowering plants, were hundreds of fronds of this fern, fresh-looking, perhaps from the wet start to June.

Unlike the fox glove, it seems to have no known toxicity or medicinal value, it is just good to look

at.

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
Baz Jones - Committee memeber

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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