FRIENDS OF YORK WALLS

TRUSTEES REPORT 2022

The trustees present their report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022.

1. Structure, Governance and Management

The Friends of York Walls was established in 2010. It is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation first registered on 20 November 2014, registration number 1159300. The charity was established with objects and powers, and is governed under the terms of its Constitution.

The trustees who served during the year were:

Bill Hill (Chair)

Samantha McDermott (Honorary Secretary)

Simon Mattam

Alan Fleming

The trustees served on the Management Committee, which had in addition the following members:

Basil Jones

Penny Heptonstall (Honorary Treasurer)

None of the trustees has any beneficial interest in the company. All the trustees guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.

The trustees have assessed the financial risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to them and to other major risks.

1. Objectives and Activities

The objects of the charity as expressed in its articles/constitution are:

1. To educate the public in the history, natural history and architecture of the historic defences of York and its city walls.

1. To secure the preservation, protection and improvement of their features.

The Fishergate Postern Tower has been the venue for the regular activities of the charity along with the walls more generally.

The Friends of York Walls have the aims to:

1. Influence the management, care and presentation of York’s City Walls and Defences for the benefit of local residents and visitors.

2. Organise and undertake practical work and public events in cooperation with the City of York Council and other like-minded groups or individuals.

3. Encourage people generally to utilise the Walls as an amenity.

4. Identify opportunities for potential improvement of the Walls.

5. Establish links with local residents.

6. Monitor and act where appropriate to protect the historical views from and towards the Walls.

7. Act as a pressure group, when necessary, to maintain high standards of maintenance of York’s Walls and fortifications.

8. Identify opportunities for possible improved access, physical and intellectual.

9. Explore the potential of Fishergate Postern and the Red Tower.

10. Establish Fishergate Postern Tower as a historical attraction.

11. Explore fundraising avenues such as grants and bequests.

12. Involve schools.

13. Create resource packages, leaflets and other material to help people appreciate the Walls.

14. Arrange walks and talks.

15. Participate in and foster local cultural events.

16. Support other like-minded organisations.

17. Consult with those interested in the Walls.

18. Develop the Friends website, Instagram, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts.

19. Communicate with members via email addresses and newsletters.

20. Raise the public profile of the group by generating local media coverage.

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

1. Achievements and Performance in 2022
   1. Opening Fishergate Postern Tower to the public

The tower was visited by 6,003 people compared with 4,916 in 2021 and 3,281 in 2020 (years of reduced openings because of COVID). The 2022 figure achieved our target of 6,000, just!

The donations made by visitors to the Tower in 2022 was £3,627 compared with £2,817 in 2021. The 2022 figure exceeded our target for 2022 of £3,550.

* 1. Planting wildflowers on the ramparts – Growing Greener Spaces grant

The aim of this project is to increase the critical mass of pollinator-friendly wildflowers on the ramparts, thus adding to their visitor interest and through this, adding to visitor engagement with the heritage of the ramparts and walls.

It also contributes to implementing the City of York Council’s Pollinator Friendly Strategy for York, and to developing the concept of Citizen Scientist in collaboration with St Nicks.

Progress was made into this project using the grant of £1,500 from the Growing Greener Spaces scheme towards the cost of wildflower plants and equipment, and a grant from Buglife who facilitated volunteers from local business for a planting day in October. This took place on an area of the ramparts next to Fishergate Postern Tower and established a foothold on which to build in 2023.

* 1. Guided Walks

These were continued, confirming our role of providing well-researched, accurate guided walks, but bespoke tailored to what visitors want.

* 1. Redesign of Timeline Display in Fishergate Postern Tower

As part of our strategy of gradual improvement of the standard of visual displays in the Tower, we began working with the designer Dianne Turner to revise the Timeline Display on the second floor. This work will continue into 2024.

* 1. Geology of the Stone used in the Walls

We secured a grant from the Geologists Association Curry Fund towards researching the geology of the stone used in the walls. This enabled us to work with a group of specialists including Dr Liam Herringshaw, geologist and paleaontologist who runs Hidden Horizons, Dr Dav Smith from the University of York (Building Archaeologist), and Professor Mike Rogerson from the University of Northumberland (Specialist in Carbonates) from the University of Northumberland. We also had inputs from the Head Stonemason at York Minster, John David, and from the Council’s Bar Walls Manager and Council’s stonemason team.

Study days were held on the walls and in Fishergate Postern Tower and the results will be written up into information leaflets and postings to provide visitors with well-researched guides to enhance their experience of the walls.

* 1. Masons’ Marks

The work on the geology of the stones of the tower brought renewed attention to the masons’ marks in the building, triggered by our experts finding several we hadn’t spotted in the past. A thorough survey was instigated and we now have 65 marks identified, covering 7 different designs. The opinion of Dav Smith is that they are all contemporary with the construction of the building in 1504, and therefore constitute an important source of historical information.

Our aim is to form a comprehensive database of the marks, which is then made available to the public and academic community on our website, and is then donated to York Explore Archives so that it has a long-term and secure home.

* 1. Artists’ Works

We began a new project to acquire a collection of artists’ works which have some aspect of the City Walls as their subject matter. This has included works from the past, and also the commissioning of local artists to generate new works. The results will be put on display in Fishergate Postern Tower to enrich the visitor experience.

* 1. Interactive Virtual Tour of Fishergate Postern Tower

This was created at no financial cost to us and is available free on our website. Users choose to move to places around and inside the tower. In each place they can look all around them, zooming in on details and choosing to call onto screen short description of each place along with extra information about the special features they can see.

* 1. Updated online guide to the City Walls Trail

Work is continually needed to update our website’s detailed guide to the City Walls Trail, a guide that City of York Council direct visitors to at the start of their own web pages on the walls. In 2020 all the text was checked and revised.

This section of the website received some 90,000 hits in 2022, more than 250 a day, underlining what a substantial piece of work it is and how valuable visitors find it.

* 1. York City Walls Audio Trail

In July 2022 the travel guide app Guid.AI invited the Friends of York walls to produce an audio trail around York’s City Walls using their free app.

The Guide.AI app gives the author full control over the structure and text input of their guide – so it was relatively simple but long task to populate the guide using the text from the existing York Walls Trail information already on the Friends of York Walls website.

The information is broken down into 27 map points with associated pictures. These sections are indicated by “Map Points”, and a “List View”, on a detailed map of York, with associated GPS links. The Guide.AI software then turns the text input into spoken words using AI. The audio guide gives an introduction to each section, with more details available on the Friends’ website. Users down-load the Audio Trail for a one-off fee of £1.99 and for this they get the 27 map points, over 100 minutes of informative audio and the full text. Each new user’s download provides the Friends with an income of 80p.

The Audio Trail went live in November 2022 and in the first two months had 60 downloads, so an income of £32.

* 1. Annual Leaflet

Our Annual Leaflet with its map of the walls had an increased print run to 10,000 mainly to meet demand from Visit York (it is one of their most ‘in-demand leaflets’) and the demands of our ‘help-yourself’ box in Bootham Bar which we keep stocked for about 60 days a year. We supply the only maps which show the full route of the ‘City Walls Trail’, the official circular walking trail marked with distinctive brass studs.

* 1. E-Newsletter

Our e-newsletter had 9 issues, reaching 500 plus people each issue. These cumulatively form a valuable record of our activities and past issues are accessible through our website.

* 1. York Walls Festival 2022

The main Festival took place over the Spring Weekend at the end of April and also continued as a summer event in August. A highlight was an evening at the Mansion House to celebrate the exchange of photographs with Nanjing in China, on display in the venue. This included a talk by Barry Crump from the University of York on the City Walls in York. Barry also contributed an extended version of this talk in the York Festival of Ideas in June 2022, labelling it as part of the York Walls Festival, achieving an audience of 250 people.

The festival and linked events like the Twilight Walks are organised by Baz Jones and received funds and general support from the Friends. We are very grateful for the energies he puts into the Festival.

* 1. Twilight Walks

Two twilight walks were held in the Autumn attended by 40 members of the public. They covered the section of the walls between Bootham Bar and Monk Bar, and have attracted wide praise for the charm of being able to experience the walls and views of the Minster at night.

* 1. Links with York University

Links with the university have been strengthened through the initiative from the International Student Coordinator to include a visit to Fishergate Postern Tower in the student welcome week in September. Arising directly from this visit, two students became volunteers contributing to our projects on the Time Line and Turret.

1. Financial Review
   1. The charity continues to be in a financially resilient position with £30,000 in the bank and a reliable income flow of £5,000 a year.

* 1. The Management Committee has reiterated its commitment to ensuring that unrestricted funds of £10,000 are held as a reserve to ensure a continuing robust financial position, but otherwise envisages the cash in hand should be used to further the objects of the charity as set out in its plans for the future below.

1. Plans for the Future

The plans for the future are to focus on:

1. Continue with the mainstream work of the charity which is the implementation of 21 Open Days at FPT and promotion of knowledge of the Walls of York and their heritage.
2. Working with the local authority to bring about the refurbishment of the roof of Fishergate Postern Tower, installation of proper electrical circuits and improved lighting, and repointing of the interior with lime mortar to reduce spalling of the stone.

1. Building on the first steps taken in 2022 to plant pollinator friendly flowers on the rampart next to Fishergate Postern Tower, working with the Council and St Nicks, the latter helping to develop the expertise of local people in becoming Citizen Scientists on the plants on the ramparts.
2. Preparing and publishing the results of the work on the geology of the walls, creating leaflets, media posts and information boards which enable visitors to engage more deeply with this aspect of the walls.
3. Continue to establish a collection of art works using the walls and towers as their subject matter/inspiration, including images from the past and commissions to contemporary artists and designers.
4. Continue to Improve the quality of the displays in Fishergate Postern Tower, including the time-line, the maps on the top floor and redesigning the ground floor.
5. Undertake a detailed record of the masons’ marks in Fishergate Postern Tower using photography and digital drawings, thus creating a database for use by the public including the academic community.
6. Taking forward the development of school packs and other ways to engage young people in the heritage of the walls.
7. Initiate a project which focuses on the families who have lived next to the walls in the Walmgate area, using this as a means of increasing the engagement of local people in the heritage of the walls and Fishergate Postern Tower.
8. Initiating a project to create a display of all the historical maps of the area round Fishergate Postern Tower, and using this as a means of attracting local people to visit and engage with the heritage of the walls.
9. Pressing ahead with the project to imagine what form of turret might have been on the top of Fishergate Postern Tower before the current tiled roof was installed and creating a visual display of the results.
10. Seeking grant funding for projects which engage local people in practical activities related to the walls and their heritage.
11. Recreate a portcullis in the postern gate, supported by explanatory models.

Bill Hill

Chair, on behalf of the Management Committee

October 2023