

Shardlake's Norwich

a self-guided trail from the City Centre to Kett's Heights

When C.J.Sansom launched his latest Shardlake historical mystery, *Tombland*, in November 2018, he said

"You can stand at Kett's Heights... on the steepest part of the escarpment next to the one surviving remnant of the chapel Kett used as his headquarters, and on a clear day you've got a magnificent view. You feel that you can almost reach out and touch the cathedral spire - that was a real highlight for me."

This trail takes you on a tour from the city centre to the site of Robert Kett's headquarters taking in many of the buildings Shardlake would have entered or seen when he was in Norwich. The text in italics refers to people or events included in *Tombland*.

Takes about 2 hours. There are many places to eat and drink along the way. The route involves steps and some steep slopes.

1 Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery

Your tour starts at the entrance to the Castle. Norwich Castle Keep was built in 1120 on top of an earlier earth defensive mound. From the 4th to the 19th centuries it was used as the county gaol. In 1894 it was converted into a museum by architect Edward Boardman. The exterior looks suspiciously well preserved because it was refaced in the 1830s largely following the original design. You can visit the dungeons as part of a guided tour.

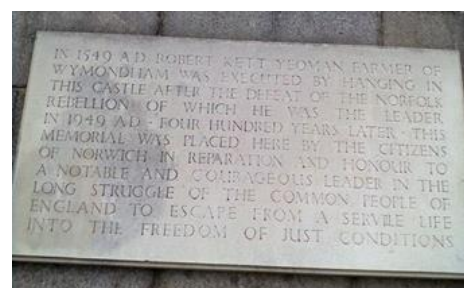
John Boleyn and Nicholas Overton were imprisoned here. Robert Kett was hanged here after being tried for treason in London. A commemorative plaque was installed next to the Castle entrance in 1949.



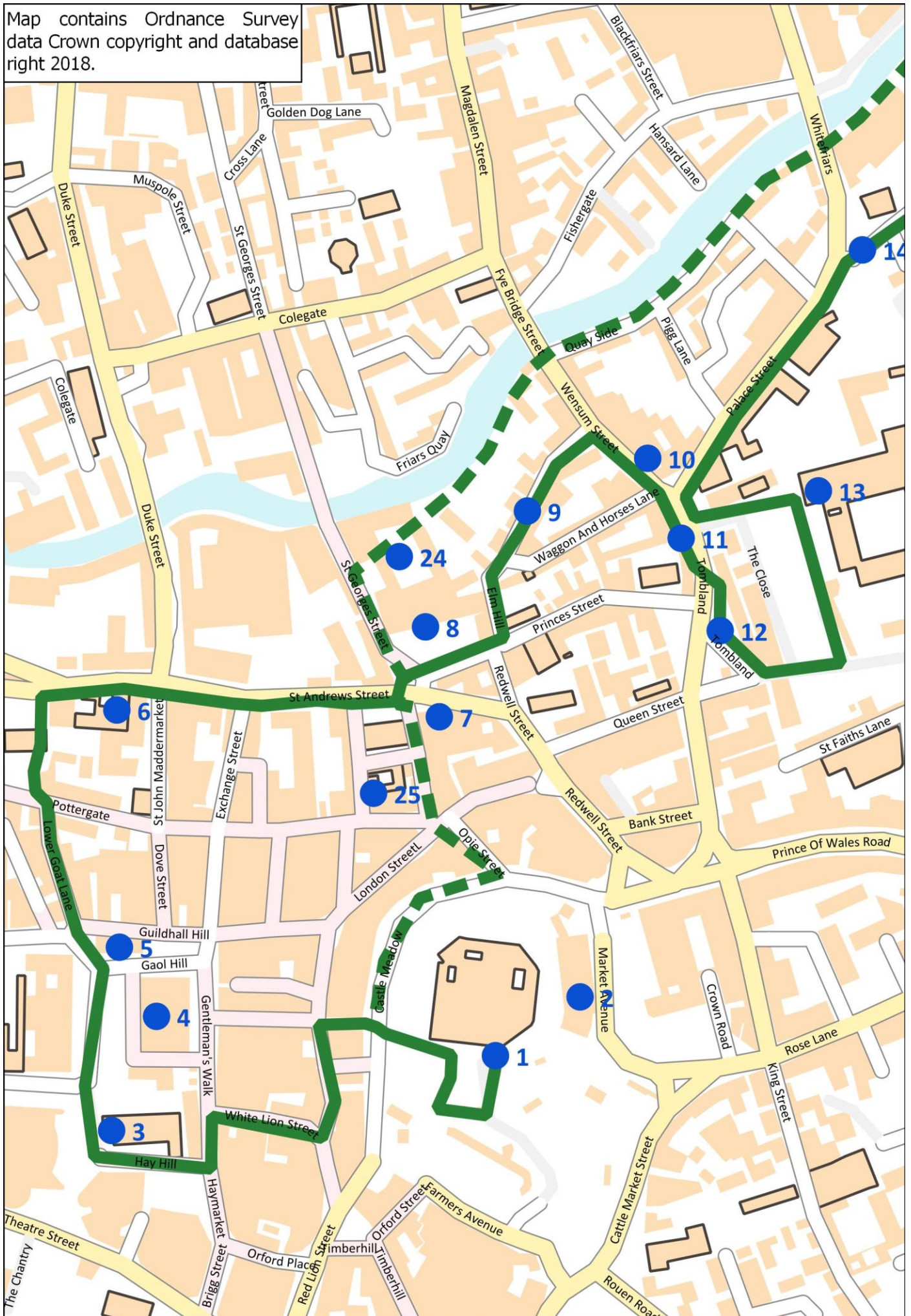
2 Shirehall

Stay with the Castle. The Assizes, where criminals were tried, were held in a building next to the Castle Keep on the mound. There is evidence of a shire house on this site as early as 1270. The original building was rebuilt in Elizabethan times and then again in the late 18th century, when a new prison block was built. Eventually, the prison was extended to cover the whole of the mound and a new Shirehall was designed by William Wilkins, but this time at street level and immediately to the east of the castle mound.

John Boleyn was tried here for the murder of his wife.



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3 St Peter Mancroft

Cross over Castle Meadow, down the slope of Arcade Street and through the Royal Arcade. Ahead of you to the left of the market is St Peter Mancroft church. This church was built in 1430 on the site of an earlier church built by the Normans. It is one of the finest parish churches in the country and well worth a visit. It was the first place in the world to have rung a true peel of bells on 2nd May 1715.

A service of celebration was held here after the defeat of Kett's rebels and an annual commemoration of the victory continued until 1667.



4 Norwich Market

Walk through the market and up the steps to City Hall. There has been a market on this site since the Anglo-Saxon market was moved from Tombland by the Normans in 1071.

The Marquess of Northampton's army camped here.



5 Guildhall

Turn right with City Hall on your left and the market on your right. Ahead is the Guildhall. Built in 1407-24, the Guildhall is the largest and most elaborate city hall ever built outside London. Henry IV's charter of 1404 gave the City the right to elect a Mayor and two Sheriffs, effectively making Norwich an independent, self-governing entity. From 1412 until 1597 the common gaol of the Norwich was in the cellars of the Guildhall.

The gallows were situated here. John Boleyn was saved from hanging through Shardlake's intervention.

Robert and William Kett were held here after being captured following the Battle of Dussindale and prior to being taken to London for trial.



6 Strangers' Hall

Walk down Lower Goat Lane, across Pottergate and take the path to the left of the Birdcage pub (St Gregory's Back Alley). At the end turn right into Charing Cross. Strangers' Hall is a short way down on your right. There has been a substantial building on this plot since the 13th century or possibly even earlier. The undercroft is thought to date from the 1320s and was used to store, and possibly display, goods for sale. The house was a prestigious dwelling, owned by many merchants and mayors who made their mark on the building - remodelling and extending it to reflect their wealth and status. It is thought that the Great Hall was built during the 15th century, when William Barley, a mercer (cloth merchant) lived here. During the period of Kett's Rebellion, the house was owned by Norwich grocer and mayor, Thomas Sotherton. This museum is well worth visiting but has limited opening hours. ***Shardlake was attacked by the Boleyn twins here when he came to confront their grandfather, Gawen Reynolds.***



7 Cinema City

Continue along Charing Cross/St Andrews Street for about 300m until you get to Cinema City on your right just beyond St Andrew's Church. Originally this was a 15th century medieval merchant house. After a chequered history the suite of buildings was converted into a thriving arts cinema. The cinema's café is housed in the medieval great hall and is well worth a visit.



8 St Andrews Hall

Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing. Opposite Cinema City is St Andrews Hall. Built between 1307 and 1470, this is the most complete medieval friary complex to survive in England. The hall is open for occasional public events.



9 Elm Hill

With St Andrew's Hall facing you turn right along Princes Street and at the crossroads turn left down Elm Hill. Elm Hill is the most complete medieval street in the city. A major fire destroyed most buildings in 1507 but the properties were rebuilt. During the medieval period it was the epicentre of society, with 16 mayors and sheriffs living there. At the right at the top of Elm Hill is the Briton's Arms, an excellent cafe. This was built as a medieval beguinage, a home for a community of lay women who dedicated their lives to prayer and helping the poor. ***This is one of Shardlake's routes into the centre of Norwich.***



John and Margaret Paston had a house on Elm Hill where some of the Paston Letters were probably written. However, this house was destroyed in 1507 and the present house on the site, the Strangers Club, was built after the fire by Sheriff of Norwich and three-times mayor, Augustine Steward, who features in *Tombland*.



You will see various signs to courts and yards off Elm Hill, built behind the medieval great houses and entered through narrow arches and passageways. These were slum-like dwellings occupied by the likes of Simon Scambler and Josephine Brown. Most of these yards have now disappeared or been “gentrified”.



10 Maid's Head Hotel

Proceed down Elm Hill and turn right at the bottom. At the junction of the main roads you will find the Maid's Head Hotel. The hotel, then called the Murtle Fish Tavern, was first mentioned in Norwich court records in 1287. Edward the Black Prince (eldest son of King Edward III) was entertained here in 1359 after a jousting competition. In 1472 John Paston confirms the name change to Maids Head in a letter, recommending the inn as a good place to stable your horse. In 1520 Queen Catherine of Aragon (King Henry VIII's first wife) is entertained here.



Shardlake and Nicholas Overton stay there. Subsequently it was taken over as part of the Earl of Warwick's HQ.

11 Augustine Steward's house

Continue along the main road. About 50m on your right is Augustine Steward's house. The crazy leaning half-timbered house was built for Augustine Steward, three times mayor of Norwich between 1540 and 1556.



Augustine Steward was acting mayor while the rebels held Norwich. The Marquess of Northampton and other army leaders dined there on 31st July to plan their attack on the rebels. The Earl of Warwick also set up his HQ there after occupying Norwich on 24th August.

12 Tombland

You are now in Tombland. The name comes from two Old English words meaning 'open ground', or an empty space. This area was used as the main market place for Norwich and was the centre of activity before the Normans arrived in 1066 and moved the market where it could be overlooked by the Castle. Tombland was transformed by the building of the Cathedral and demolition of many surrounding buildings.

This is a pivotal place in the novel; everyone seems to pass through at some point. Gawen Reynolds, grandfather to the twins, lived here, near to Augustine Steward's house.



13 Norwich Cathedral

Opposite Augustine Steward's house is Norwich Cathedral. Enter the Close by the large decorated gate opposite and slightly to the right. You can then walk through the upper green, visit the Cathedral, and exit out of the lower gate. The Cathedral was founded in 1096 by the first Bishop of Norwich, Bishop Herbert de Losinga. In order to create the new cathedral, priory and precinct, several existing churches and many homes were destroyed. The cathedral precinct or 'Close' is the largest to survive in England and also has the largest number of residential houses within it. These houses range from 18th century townhouses to homes converted from what remained of the 14th and 15th monastic buildings.

Robert Kett sets up a temporary HQ here. It also housed the wounded and horses were stabled here.



14 St Martin's Plain

Return to Tombland and turn right, heading back towards the Maid's Head. Turn right down Palace Street until you come to an open area adjacent to the church of St Martin-at-Palace.

There was a church on this site before the Norman Conquest although much of what you now see was built in the 14th/15th centuries.

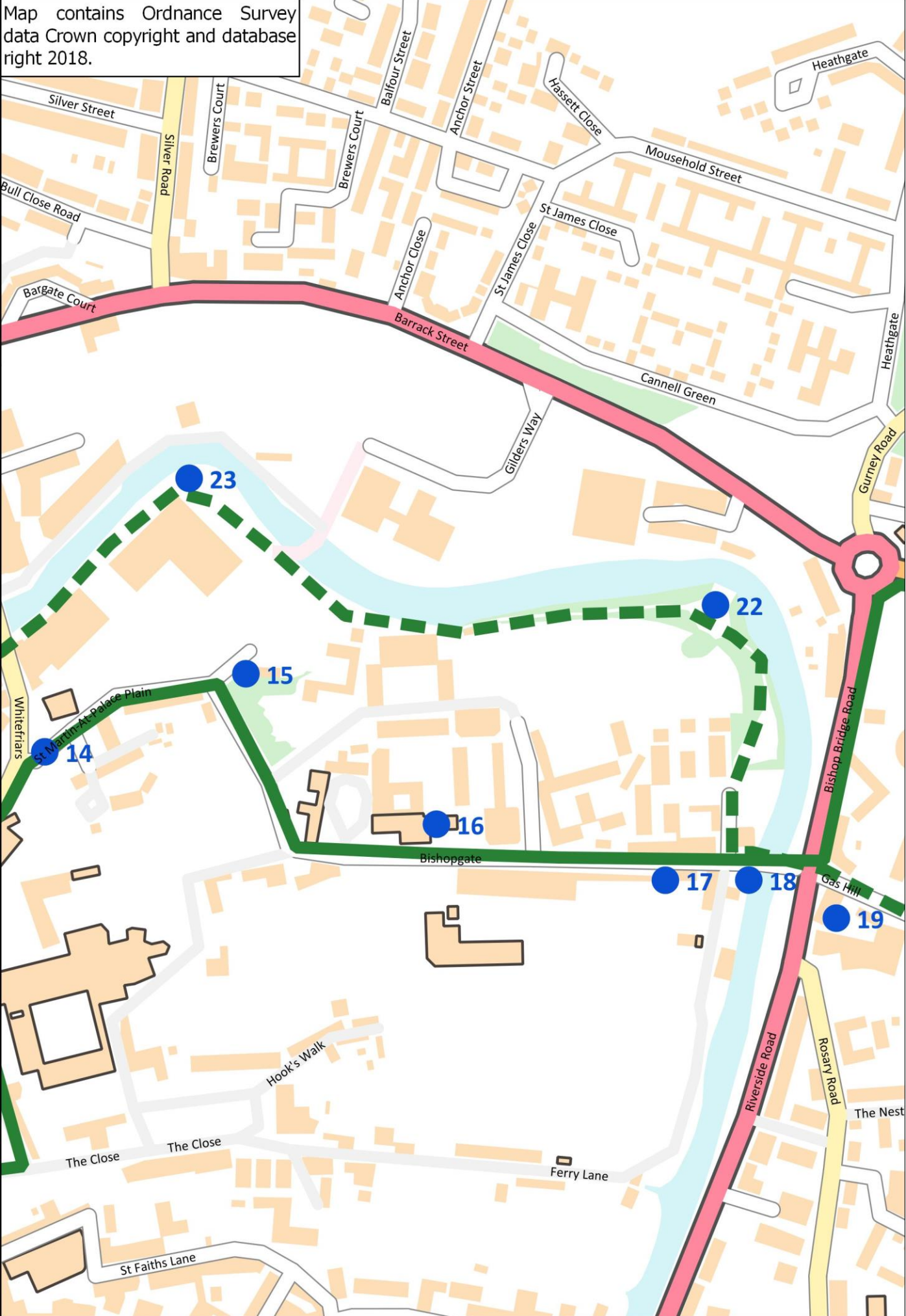
The rebels defeated Northampton's army here on 1st August.



Turn right down St Martin-at-Palace Plain which then becomes Bishopgate. Opposite the entrance to the law courts is a plaque marking the place where Lord Sheffield died during Kett's Rebellion.



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15 Adam and Eve pub

The Adam and Eve pub is just beyond the law courts. It is widely claimed to be the oldest pub in the city. A reference in 1249 tells of a brewhouse owned by Benedictine monks at the nearby Great Hospital and used by workmen building the cathedral, although the pub seen today is a 17th building.



16 Great Hospital

Follow Bishopgate curving right then left. On your left is the Great Hospital complex. Founded in 1249 by Bishop Walter de Suffield to provide care for poor aged priests, poor scholars, and sick and hungry paupers. Thirty beds were earmarked in the west end of the church for the sick poor, and thirteen paupers were to be fed at the hospital gates each day. Over the centuries the Great Hospital has expanded into a large sheltered housing complex. *The City cannon were located in the Great Hospital fields. The rebels confronted Northampton's army in Holme Street (as Bishopgate was then called). The Great Hospital's walls were broken down to enable Kett's men to storm into Norwich.*



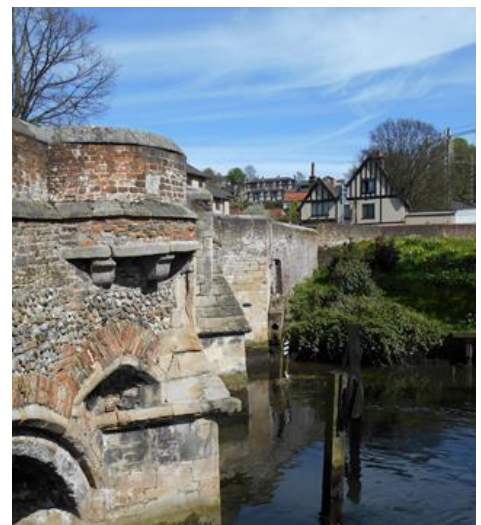
17 The Hermitage

On the opposite side of the road shortly before the bridge is a thatched house. The Hermitage is a 15th century flint and timber-framed house with 17th and 19th century additions. It was at one time the rectory of St Mary in the Marsh Church, which was closed in 1564 but much of the building remains within Nos. 10-12 Lower Close.



18 Bishop Bridge

Immediately ahead of you is Bishop Bridge. This dates from about 1340 replacing an earlier stone and timber structure. Bishop Bridge originally had a fortified gatehouse which formed part of the walled city's defences. The gate was one of the earliest demolished in 1791, when it was found to be damaging the structure of the bridge. At the city end of the bridge some of the gate's stonework can still be seen on the right side down the steps. *This is another pivotal location in Tombland. The locksmith was found drowned here. The bridge was stormed by the rebels, some swimming across the river to avoid the pinch point. Simon Scambler was killed there on 24th August. Simon is a fictional character but a real boy did bare his buttocks and was killed here.*



Next to the bridge is the Red Lion pub. The original building dates from the 16th century.

This is the site of the Blue Boar Inn where Jack Barak stays and Nicholas Overton was attacked in the privy.

The high ground beyond the bridge is where Kett's encampment was located, with Kett's HQ (which you will be visiting shortly) on the left of Gas Hill and Surrey Place on the right. The main encampment was on Mousehold Heath further along to the left.



19 Lollards Pit pub

On the opposite side of the river is the Lollards Pit pub. The building began life as a house, built in the 15th century, although it has had extensive remodelling. It is built adjacent to a medieval execution site after which it is now named. Lollards believed that the Bible should be available for all to read in English and, in consequence, were persecuted by the established church. Many Lollards were burned to death in the 15th and 16th centuries.



Over the bridge, cross the road at the pedestrian crossing, turn left and continue up to the roundabout. (NB You will pass a bus stop from which you can catch a bus back to the city centre after visiting Kett's Heights.) Turn right up Kett's Hill for about 100m. On your right you will find Kett's Heights, Kett's HQ and providing one of the most commanding views over Norwich as Kett himself recognised.

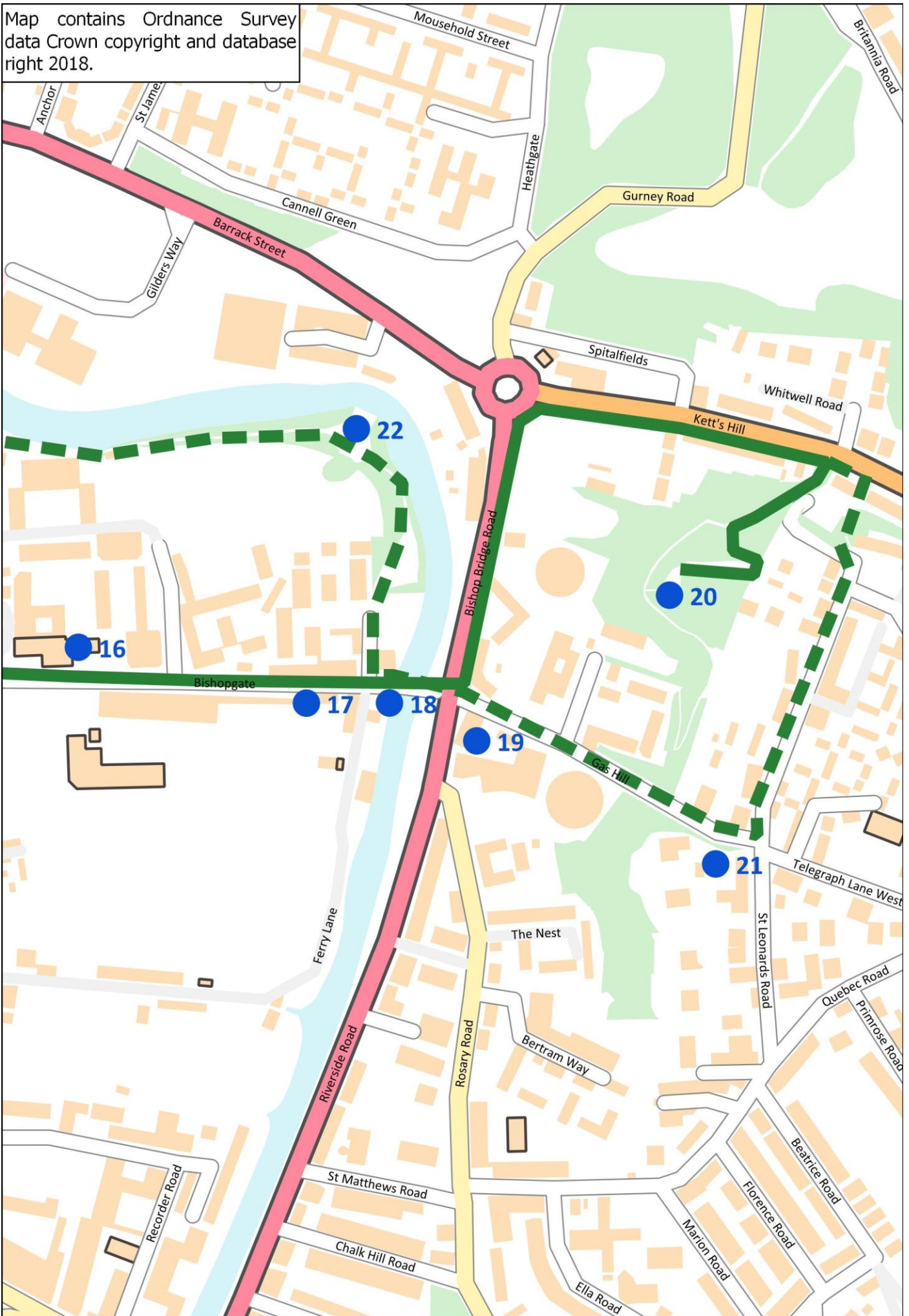


On your left the high ground is Mousehold Heath. In Tudor times Mousehold Heath was continuously open countryside from Norwich to the edge of the Broads that was almost treeless. The local population was free to collect wood from the heath and to allow their stock to graze.

This was the location of Kett's main camp. Men and women arrived and set up camp on 12th July. This is the site of the Oak of Reformation where gentlemen, including Nicholas Overton, were tried for offences against commoners. Kett's forces congregated there for important announcements.



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20 St Michael's Chapel, and 21 Surrey Place

Follow the paths to the top of the site. In the late 11th century Herbert Losinga, the first bishop of Norwich, embarked upon an ambitious building programme including the magnificent cathedral. At the same time he also had a priory built on a clearing made in the wooded hills above the river at the top of what is now Gas Hill. It was dedicated to the French Saint Leonard, and covered 24 acres of land. An existing Saxon church dedicated to St Michael had been among the buildings demolished to make room for the cathedral. To make amends, Losinga also built a small chapel about 42 feet in length and about 18 feet in width some 200 yards away from St Leonards, and named it for St Michael.



For several centuries the monks of St Leonards held daily services. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-41), St Leonards Priory was given to the Dukes of Norfolk. The third Duke's son, the Earl of Surrey, built a fine house called Surrey Place on the site while little St Michael's fell into disuse and is now just a ruin. Surrey Place has now been replaced with a modern house.

Robert Kett set up his HQ in the chapel. Surrey Place was used for keeping gentlemen prisoners. Shardlake, John Boleyn and Nicholas Overton were imprisoned there on 26th August before being used as human shields when the rebels face Warwick's army on Mousehold Heath. The escarpment provided an ideal vantage point for Kett's canons to fire on the city.



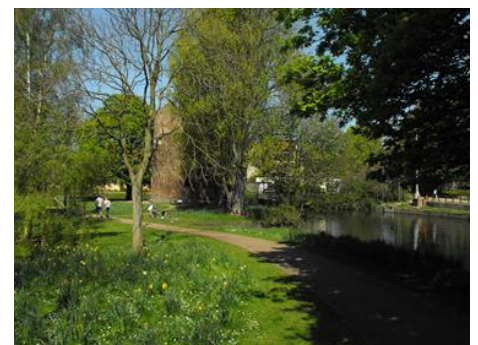
This is the culmination of the tour. You can return to the centre of Norwich the way you came, either walking or taking the bus.

Alternatively, you can make a very pleasant round trip by returning along the river following the dotted green route. (NB Riverside walk is closed at night).

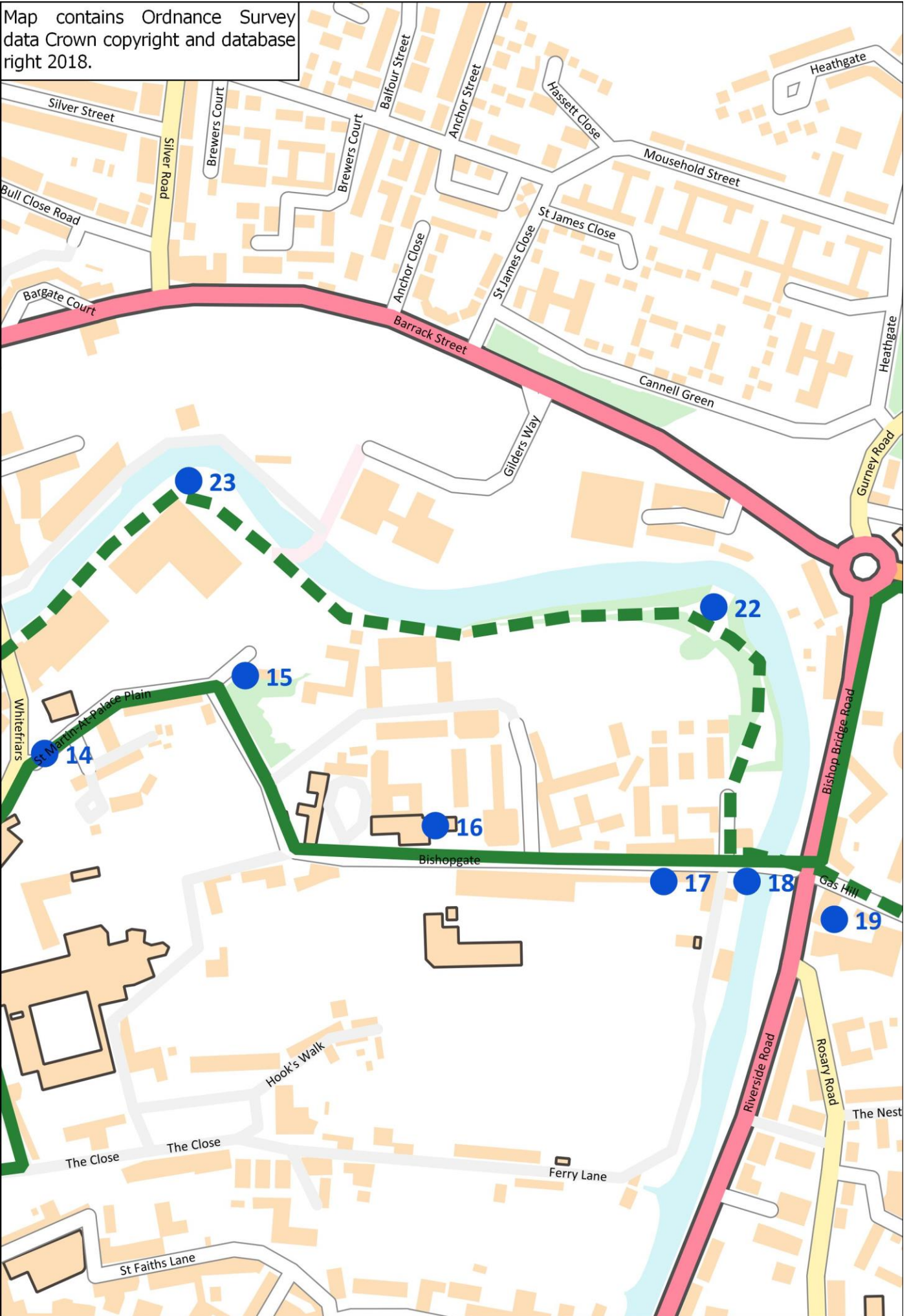
Turn right as you leave Kett's Heights and almost immediately turn right up a set of steps leading to St Leonards Road. Keep going straight ahead for about 200m until you get to Gas Hill, and turn right down the hill.

On your left is the site of St Leonard's Priory/Surrey Place, now a modern house.

Go down Gas Hill and cross over Bishop Bridge. Turn right past the Red Lion pub following the brown sign to Cow Tower and the riverside walk.



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22 Cow Tower

Within about 100m you will come across the Cow Tower. Built originally as a toll house and prison by the prior of the cathedral some time after 1249. It was given to the city authorities in 1378 and was then reconstructed and refaced in brick as a free standing artillery tower c.1398/9 which played a part in Kett's Rebellion.



23 Medieval City walls

Just beyond the new Jarrold Bridge you can see the remains of the medieval defensive walls where they meet the river. Work started on the walls in 1294 and they were completed in the mid-14th century. When completed they formed the longest circuit of urban defences in Britain, eclipsing even those of London. Today only fragments remain but the Norwich Society has produced a set of trails for you to discover more about them

<https://www.thenorwichsociety.org.uk/explore-norwich/trails>



Cross the road at Whitefriars Bridge and continue along the riverside walk.

Cross the road at Fye Bridge and continue on the path down the left side of the Ribs of Beef pub.

24 Norwich University of the Arts

The path takes you through the campus of Norwich University of the Arts, which occupies the medieval West and East Garth of St Andrew's Hall. A garth is the central square garden within cloisters.

The path takes you through the garth, through an arch and into pedestrianised St George's Street. Turn left. At the end of the street and you will see St Andrew's Hall on your left and Cinema City ahead.



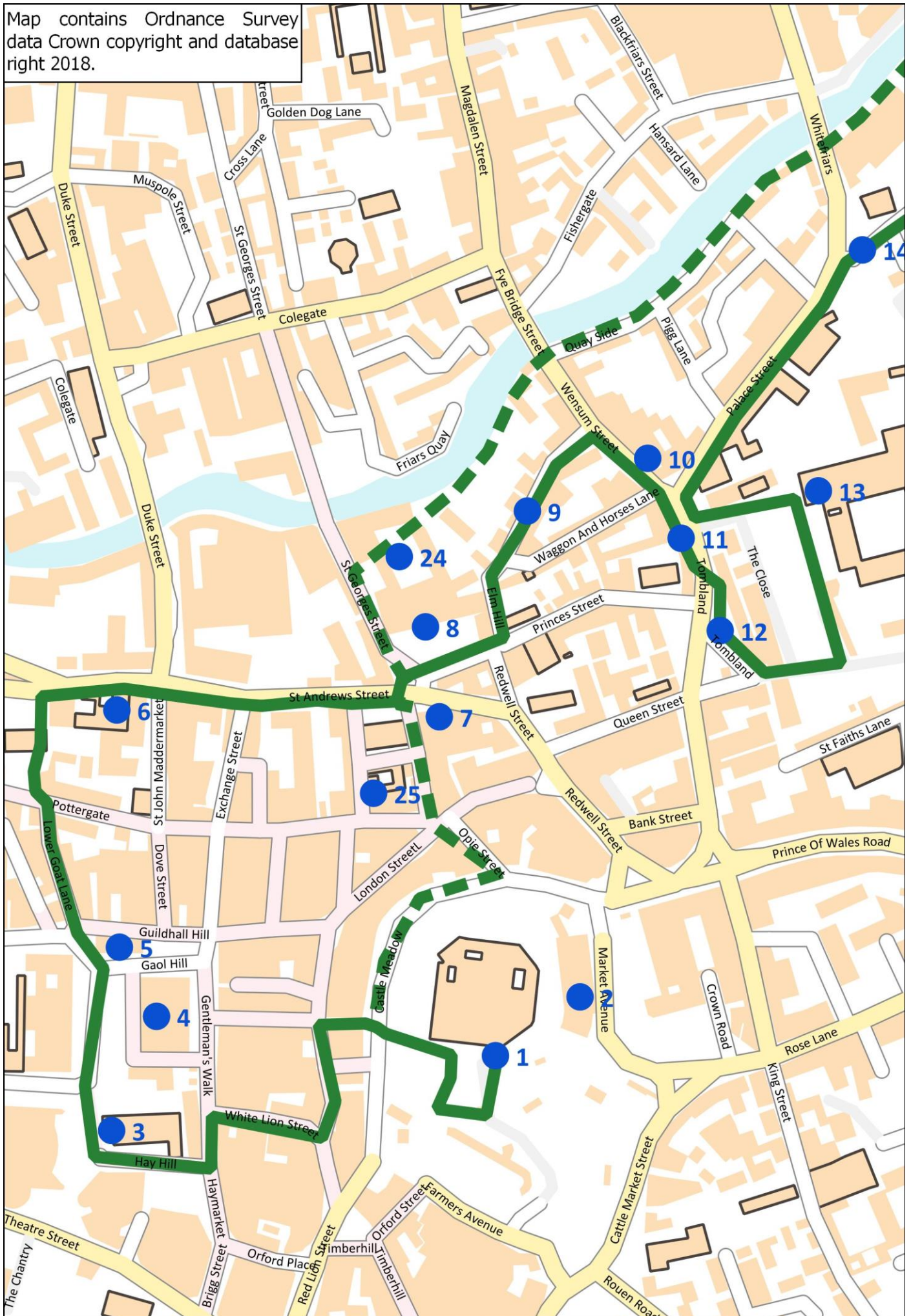
25 Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell

Cross at the pedestrian crossing and go straight up St Andrew's Hill. On your right, just beyond Bishop's restaurant, is the long flint wall of the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell. The Museum of Norwich is housed in an early merchant's house built in 1370. It has had a varied history as a Bridewell, or prison for women and beggars, from the 16th to 19th centuries until the new city gaol was built. It is now a fascinating museum and well worth a visit.



At the top of the hill bear left then immediately right up Opie Street, and you are back at the Castle.

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We hope you have enjoyed your tour. Find out more about

The Norwich Society

is a member organisation celebrating Norwich's unique character and beauty, preserving its heritage and shaping our future.

- The Society helps protect Norwich's historic buildings and keeps a watching brief on new development. Inspirational new buildings are recognised through the Society's biennial Design Awards scheme.
- Members are kept up-to-date with a monthly e-newsletter, and enjoy a varied events programme, a twice yearly journal containing articles about Norwich, and an annual publication about an aspect of Norwich.
- Find out more and join us.

www.thenorwichsociety.org.uk

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- A welcoming space for the local community and visitors to Norwich
- An attractive space with a wide diversity of plants and wildlife
- An event space with activities to suit a wide audience
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www.kettsheights.co.uk