



THE
NORWICH
SOCIETY

Norwich Textiles Trail

*Explore the buildings associated
with Norwich's world-famous
textiles industry*



C *Costume & Textile Association* **TA**
COSTUME & TEXTILE ASSOCIATION



This trail takes you round some of the buildings and locations associated with Norwich's textile industry.



The whole trail takes about 2 hours. A route is suggested but it is up to you how much of the trail you want to do. There are plenty of cafes and pubs along the way if you want to take your time.



We suggest you start at Foundry Bridge, next to the Railway Station. If you are driving, there is a large multi-storey carpark in nearby Rose Lane.



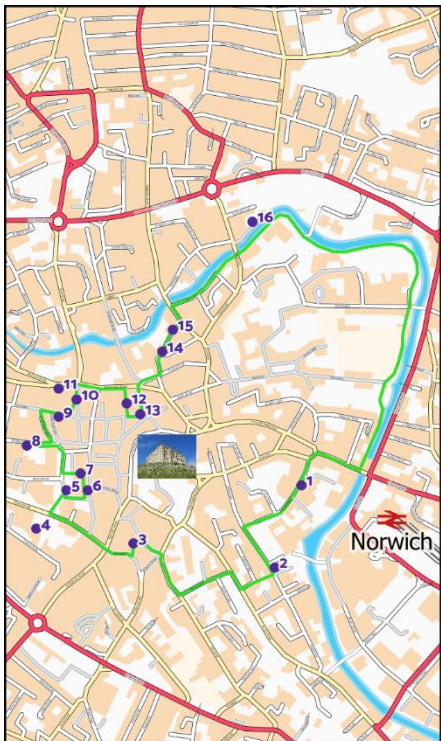
To help you navigate, each numbered site has the **///what3words** code attached.



If you want to find out more about Norwich textiles, there are links to the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and the Norfolk Costume & Textiles Association at the end.



We hope you enjoy discovering more about Norwich and the trade that make it prosperous.



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Background history

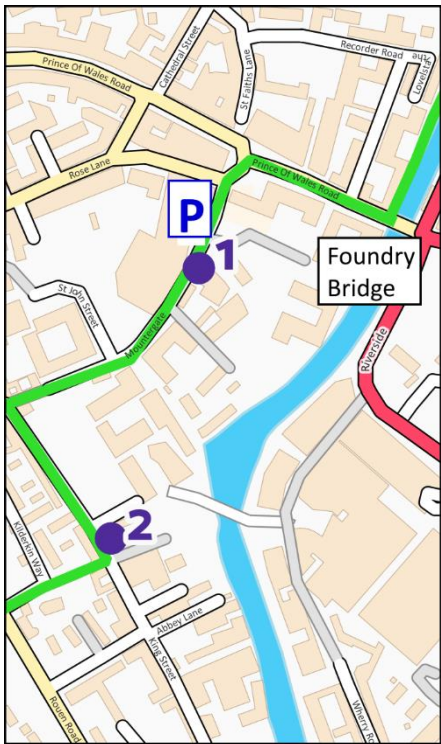
Norwich was a centre of weaving as early as 1174 and, by the 1670s, 50% of freemen were connected with the textile trade. The Norwich worsted trade grew rapidly throughout the early 18th century and the exports of worsted and Norwich stuffs captured a world market. In the late 18th and 19th centuries Norwich shawls became famous as a must-have fashion item. Sadly, by 1900 only about 2,000 people were engaged in the textile industry and in the 1901 census there were no worsted weavers at all in the city.



By the end of the 18th century there were 12,000 looms in the city. Norwich master weavers employed out-reach workers who worked from home. This explains a feature of many older Norwich houses – the unusually tall attics with dormer windows the full height of the roof.

Working in their homes, assisted by draw-boys, the weaver had control of how the design and colours were put into the weave. On receiving a commission from a master, the weaver collected the yarn required and was given a painted design on which a graph showed the crossing points of the warps and the wefts.

There are still a number of weavers' cottages remaining which have the distinctive windows – either dormer windows or long attic windows.



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Starting at Foundry Bridge, walk up Prince of Wales Road, branch left into Rose Lane and then turn left into Mountergate.

1 Weavers' House in

Mountergate is a former weavers' factory and latterly shoe and boot factory, built around the 17th and 18th centuries with 20th and 21st century alterations and adaptations.

[///scouts.teach.mice](http://scouts.teach.mice)



Walk to the end of Mountergate and turn left into King Street.

2 **Dragon Hall** is a medieval trading hall built in about 1427 by a wealthy merchant called Robert Toppes. This was not his home but was a business complex to display, store and sell Norfolk goods, such as textiles, as well as imports from Europe and beyond. It is one of Norwich's medieval architectural gems.

[/// swift.orchestra.kings](http://swift.orchestra.kings)



The next stage is a bit complicated. Walk up St Julian's Alley into Rouen Rd and turn right. Walk up Rouen Road, turning left onto Thorne Lane. At the top turn right into Ber Street. At the main junction cross straight over to Timberhill and look for Lion and Castle Yard on the left next to the Two Magpies Bakery.

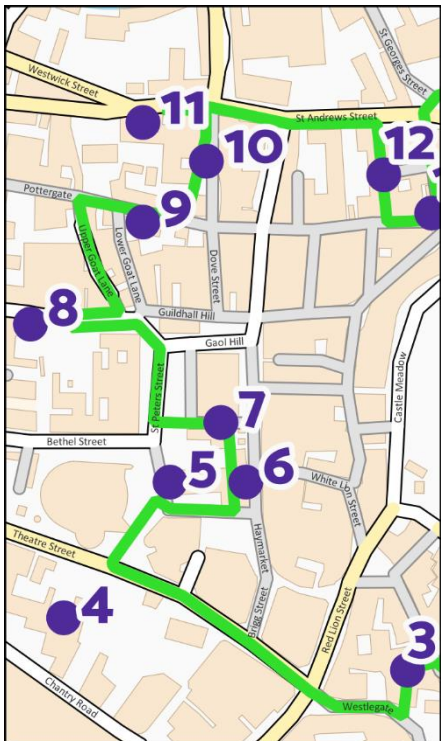
3 Weavers' cottages, 17th century, Lion and Castle Yard. These were renovated by the Norwich Preservation Trust in the 1990s and repurposed as business premises.

/// tries.spice.steep





Continue down Lion and Castle Yard and turn right into Westlegate. At the main road cross straight over into Rampant Horse Street with M&S on your left. Continue uphill and the Assembly House is on your left.



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4 The weaving industry declined greatly in the 19th century as a result of competition from cheaper production in the North. In 1826 a ball was held at the **Assembly House** in Theatre Street to raise money for starving weavers. The guests were asked to wear red – a special Norwich colour. Built by Thomas Ivory in 1755, the Assembly House was an elegant venue for society gatherings.

/// stacks.person.when



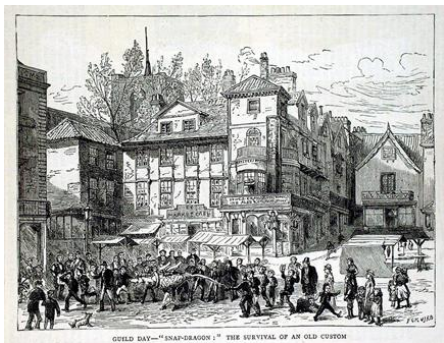
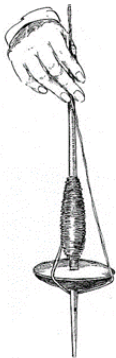
Cross over the road to St Peter Mancroft.

5 Medieval annual Guild celebrations were held at **St Peter Mancroft** on Corpus Christi day (a moveable feast occurring between 21 May and 24 June) when all the Guilds paraded.

/// debit.amount.silent



The dyers, wool sorters and weavers paraded last as they were the most important. The Guilds ran schools, hospitals and controlled the quality and price of all crafts. An apprenticeship took 7 years and children started as young as 8 years old.



GUILD DAY—“SNAP-DRAGON”: THE SURVIVAL OF AN OLD CUSTOM

A revival of Guild Day in the 19th century

6 You can find evidence of the weaving trade in some of the old street names. **Weaver's Lane**, is at the east end of St Peter Mancroft, and now mainly a cut-through from Hay Hill to the market and sadly filled with bins.

///sorry.trying.chill

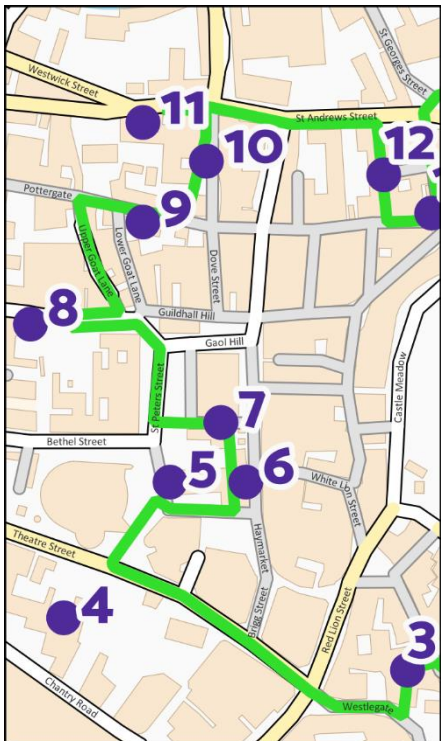


Here's what it looked like in the mid 19th century in a view by Henry Ninham.



7 **Norwich Market** was founded in the late 11th century when the Normans moved the Anglo-Saxon market from Tombland, and it is still flourishing over 900 years later. Traditionally, textile traders occupied stalls just to the north of St Peter Mancroft next to the Sir Garnet Wolsey, and clothes stalls still predominate here. **///think.body.dinner**





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Walk along the front of City Hall and turn left into St Giles Street and walk about 50m.

8 In the late 18th and 19th centuries Norwich shawls became famous as a must-have fashion item.



The well-known Norwich shawl came about because city alderman John Harvey (1755-1842) found a way to replicate the expensive and desirable shawls from Kashmir using a combination of wool and silk. You can see **John Harvey's fine house in St Giles.**
///accent.prono.moving



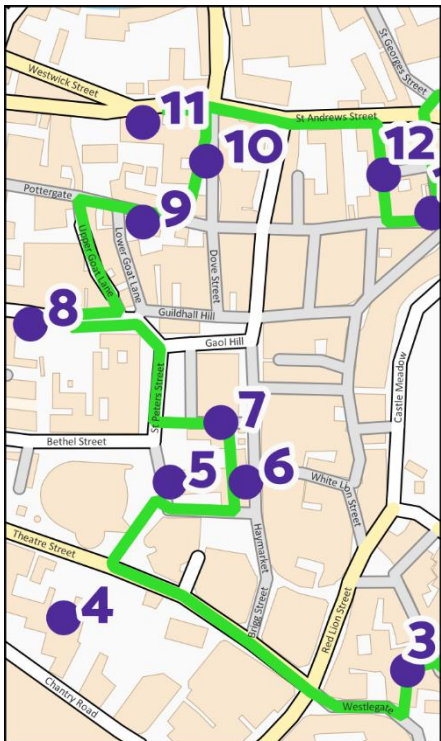
Norwich weavers were highly skilled craftsmen, with a long reputation for the excellent quality of their work. During the 1830s and 40s they produced shawls with a variety of beautiful designs, which are distinctly 'Norwich' in origin.

The Clabburn family were particularly famous and had been weavers since the 18th century. Clabburn Sons & Crisp was set up in 1846 by Thomas Clabburn with two of his sons and Thomas Dawson Crisp, and became very successful. The Great Exhibition of 1851, with over six million visitors between May and October, provided a splendid marketing opportunity, which the firm did not hesitate to exploit. It was reported that Thomas Clabburn exhibited

*...a rich cashmere shawl
manufactured by this firm in Norwich
which we understand was purchased
by the Queen. It is the first attempt
in Norwich at shawl weaving on a
Jacquard loom. For fineness of
texture, variety and beauty of
colours and elegance of pattern it
cannot be surpassed.*

It is to the credit of these Norwich weavers of the first half of the 19th century that, despite fierce competition from other centres, and the political and economic setbacks of the time, Norwich shawls continued to be successful; Queen Victoria had at least 5 Norwich shawls.





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Retrace your steps slightly, cross the road and go down Upper Goat Lane. Turn right into Pottergate and walk for about 50m. You will find a rather undistinguished shop front, but the site has a long history marked by a blue plaque.

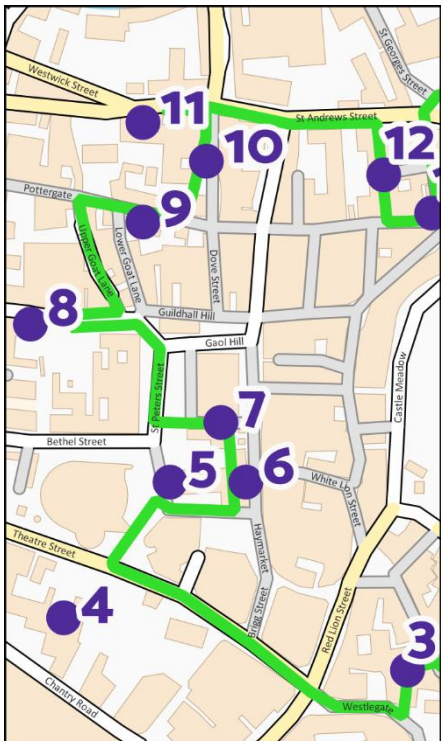
9 Between 1397 and 1550 a market selling cloth from the village of **Worstead** was sold on this site in Pottergate. Worsted cloth (slight change in spelling) was made from long staple wool, which produced stronger, finer, smoother and harder cloth than ordinary wool. The term 'worsted' is still famous today, particularly for men's suiting.

///perky.bind.ashes



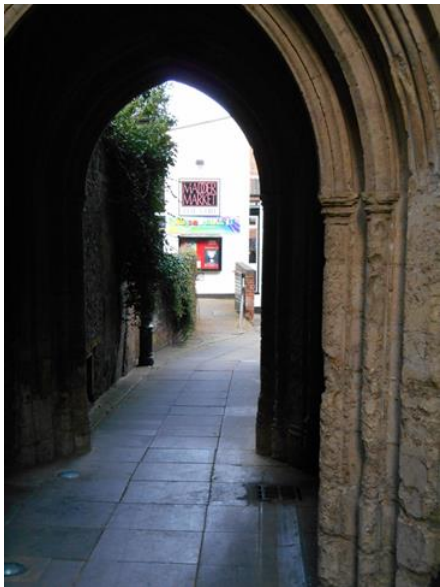
Outside the café opposite is a pavement plaque commemorating the 15th century weavers.





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Continue down Pottergate and turn left through the archway next to St John Maddermarket Church into St John's Alley. This is the area called Maddermarket.



10 **Maddermarket**, where dye stuffs were sold, is a former ancient market with records going back as far as the 13th century. The name comes from the Madder plant, the roots of which were used to produce the red dye used by textile manufacturers to dye yarn, most famously for Norwich shawls.

The name is commemorated in the Maddermarket Theatre and in a pavement plaque at the bottom of the alley. **///since.mirror.boring**



Norwich became famous for scarlet dyeing. Early in the 18th century, a Norwich chemist, Michael Stark, perfected a process which dyed silks and worsteds to an identical shade. So successful was his process, that yarns and cloth were sent to Norwich from all over the kingdom to be dyed 'Norwich Red'.



The dye works has a definite downside. The Dukes of Norfolk built two palaces between Charing Cross and the river, in 1561 and 1672, but proximity to the river caused problems. According to Thomas Baskerville in 1681:

"We landed at the Duke of Norfolk's Palace, a sumptuous new-built house...but seated in a dung-hole place, though it has cost the Duke already 30 thousand pounds in building..., for it hath but little room for gardens, and is pent up on all sides both on this and the other side of the river, with tradesmen's and dyers' houses, who foul the water by their constant washing and cleaning their cloth."

The River Wensum is reported to have run red due to the madder dye. In 1850 it was reported that residents near the Duke's Palace Bridge, were taking their water supply directly below the dye works, and the water was coloured according to the dye being used. People found brown coloured water the best as ***“the black spoiled the tea and so did the scarlet”***.



Turn left at the end of St John's Alley and walk about 50m to Strangers' Hall.

11 **Strangers' Hall** has a long history connected to the weaving trade. During the 16th century, the house was owned by Norwich grocer and mayor, Thomas Sotherton, and it is as a result of his entrepreneurism that the house eventually became known as Strangers' Hall. The first 'strangers' to receive sanctuary here were Dutch, Walloon and Flemish refugee weavers who fled the low countries in the 16th century as a result of the persecution of Dutch Calvinists by their Spanish (Catholic) rulers. Thomas Sotherton was keen to encourage these skilled workers to settle in Norwich because their skills in textile weaving would contribute to the prosperity of Norfolk.

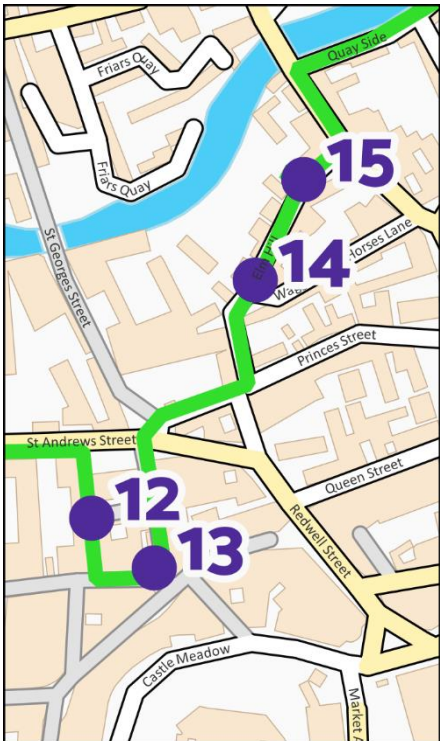
///hours.precautions.drive



Inside Strangers' Hall, **Lady Payne's bedchamber** gives a sense of the vibrant colour and textiles that would have featured in a Tudor room. The bed is hung with a reproduction Dornix, a union fabric combining linen thread with wool.



With Strangers' Hall behind you, turn right, crossing Exchange Street, until you get to Bridewell Alley, which houses the Museum of Norwich.



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12 **The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell** houses displays of Norwich shawls, rare pattern books and a 19th century Jacquard loom. The example in the Bridewell is a mid-nineteenth century hand-loom, adapted a little later to take a Jacquard mechanism to produce the more complicated all-silk fabrics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

[///codes.renew.racks](http://codes.renew.racks)



The Jacquard loom was a French invention using punched cards to determine the weaving pattern and was patented in 1804. By the 1820s, Jacquard technology had spread to Britain. Willett & Nephew set up some Jacquard Looms in Pottergate just before 1830 and they were destroyed by the traditional weavers trying to protect their livelihoods.



An example of a shawl woven on a Jacquard loom
by Clabburn Sons & Crisp,

Norfolk Museums Service



*Continue up Bridwell Alley, turn left and
left again into St Andrew's Hill.*

13 **2-4 St Andrew's Hill** is a 17th century building on what was once a medieval thoroughfare. You can see a fine example of a weaver's window on the 2nd floor. The building was restored by the Norwich Preservation Trust in 1991. The Trust was set up in 1966 by the City Council and the Norwich Society to provide a practical means of saving and conserving historic buildings in Norwich.

[///fish.magma.dream](http://fish.magma.dream)



Continue down St Andrew's Hill, turn right and walk across St Andrew's Plain in front of Blackfriars Hall and turn left into Elm Hill.

14 **Elm Hill** is the most complete Tudor street in the city. A major fire destroyed most buildings in 1507 but the properties were immediately rebuilt. During the medieval period it was the epicentre of society, with 16 mayors and sheriffs living there. In the 1920s and '30s Elm Hill was under threat from demolition and redevelopment. The Norwich Society ran a successful campaign to save Elm Hill as one of the architectural gems of the city.

///bags.sheep.turned



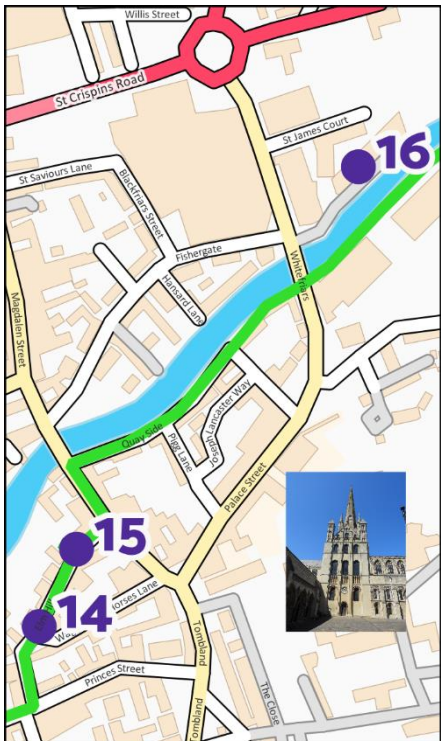
15 Elm Hill housed a number of weavers, most notably Towler & Campin, whose premises were in **Towlers Court** between 28 and 30 Elm Hill.

///nails.grass.plenty



Go through the arch to the public gardens to the rear of the building. Look back towards Elm Hill and you can see the Towler workshops on the right with large windows on the upper floor.





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Return to Elm Hill and turn left into Wensum Street. Just before Fye Bridge, turn right into Quayside and continue along the Riverside Walk. Just beyond the next bridge, Whitefriars Bridge, you will see St James Mill on the opposite bank.

16 **St James's Mill** was built between 1836 and 1839 in an attempt by the Norwich Yarn Company to prevent the collapse of the local textile trade. It was fitted with power looms to try and make the trade more efficient and lucrative. Originally there were six buildings in the mill complex - the mill, two weaving sheds, two engine houses and a boiler house with a 150 foot chimney. Now only the mill and the engine house remain as a fine monument to past industry.

[///finds.dime.eager](http://finds.dime.eager)



End of the textiles industry

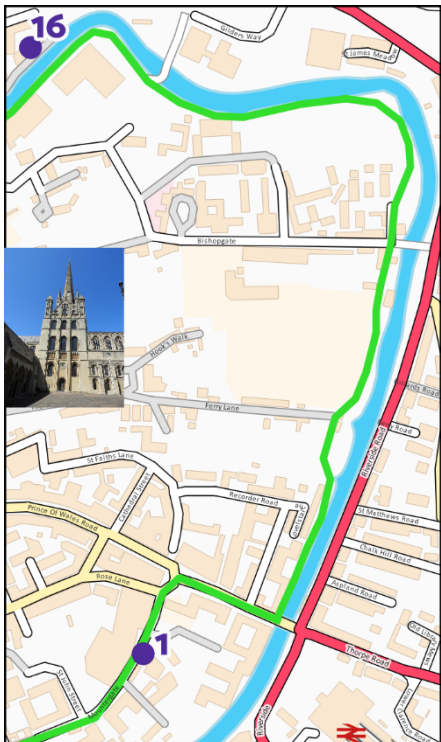
By the 1870s shawl-wearing was in decline. Dress styles changed and the new bustle skirts did not allow shawls to drape well. Women were becoming more active and a mantle with sleeves was much more convenient than a draped shawl over the shoulders.



The mass production of Paisley shawls had robbed the shawls of their prestige; it could mean that a lady was in danger of seeing her cook wearing the same style of shawl! An industry which had lasted for 500 years was sadly over, and was replaced with shoe making, brewing, chocolate making, engineering, insurance and banking so that the city's prosperity continued.



This is the end of our trail. If you keep following the Riverside Walk you will end up back at Foundry Bridge. However, you could also make a deviation to look around the nearby Norwich Cathedral and Close.



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Find out more



<http://www.ctacostume.org.uk/>

MUSEUM *of*
NORWICH
at the Bridewell

Visit or on-line:

[https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/
museum-of-norwich](https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/museum-of-norwich)



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helps preserve its heritage and
contributes to shaping its future.**

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