

## Norwich Guildhall Tour: Every Step is a Different Height

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by Anisa // 0 Comments



The Norfolk & Norwich Festival offers quite a diverse programme of music, performance, and art. One of the unique events in 2022 is Every Step is a Different Height. It's an opportunity to do a tour of the Norwich Guildhall.

It was fascinating to be able to go inside the Guildhall and see rooms that have played a part in Norwich's history for 500 years. Let me tell you more about our tour of the Norwich Guildhall.

*\*We were given press tickets so that we could share the experience with our readers.*





A beautiful mosaic of a castle and a lion greets you inside the Norwich Guildhall.

## About the Norwich Guildhall

You can't miss the striking building with chequerboard flint and ashlar stone on Gaol Hill by the Norwich Market. It is England's largest and most elaborate provincial medieval Guildhall. In 1956, it was given Grade-I listed.

Built between 1407 and 1413, the Guildhall served as the seat of city government for 500 years until it was replaced by the newly-built City Hall in 1938. It became home to the city's civic administration, law courts, and gaol.



Prisoners were kept in the gaol as recently as the 1980s.

Magistrates' Courts continued to be held in the old Common Council Chamber until 1977 and prisoners were held in the building until the early 1980s. Since then it has been home to a number of tenants over recent years.





Many important cases were decided by judges sitting in this chair inside the Guildhall.

In recent years, you could have had lunch in a restaurant or did an escape room in the Guildhall. Now it houses the Norfolk & Norwich Festival offices along with Angel's Crystal shop.

In 2008, the Guildhall was named one of the Norwich 12, which was an initiative by Norwich Heritage Economic and Regeneration Trust (HEART) to develop 12 of Norwich's most iconic buildings into an integrated family of heritage attractions.

### **About Every Step is a Different Height**

"Every Step is a Different Height" is an hour-long tour of the Norwich Guildhall which takes you through unique spaces of the medieval building. It gets its name because there is one flight of stairs where every step is a different height.

The tour guides are from the newly formed Guild of Wayfinders, a Festival 250 project, that celebrates our 250 years of the Norfolk & Norwich Festival. They will share the history of the Guildhall and stories from festivals past.





Our lovely volunteer tour guides.

This event is directed by Lone Twin's Gregg Whelan and Gary Winters who worked along with Creative Associate Jade-Marie Anderson.

Unfortunately, this tour is not suitable for those with mobility issues. As you might expect with a historic building, there are uneven steps and sections of flooring throughout the building.

At the time of writing, all the tours for the [2022 Norfolk & Norwich Festival](#) have sold out. If you missed this tour, you may be able to do a tour of the Guildhall as part of [Norfolk Heritage Open Days](#). It's best to check the Norfolk & Norwich Festival website for upcoming tours [here](#).

## Inside Norwich Guildhall

Our tour started with introductions just inside the main entrance to the Guildhall. Instead of going further into the building, we were first directed outside so that we could enter through a Tudor doorway. Known as the Bassingham Gate, it was added in the 19th century.



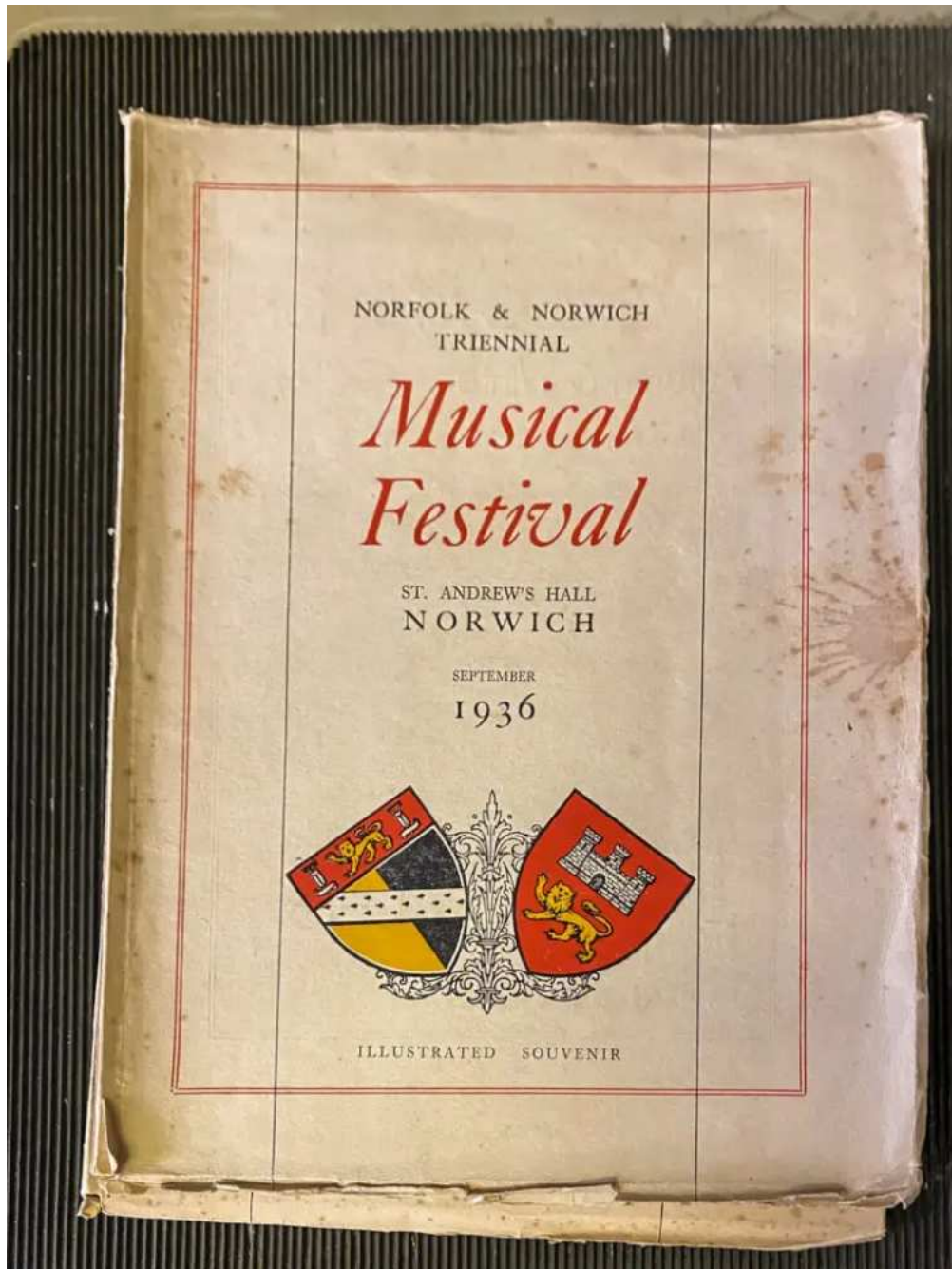
Once back inside the building, we were allowed to enter what used to be a courthouse on the ground floor. It has been transformed into the offices of the Norfolk & Norwich Festival.

We were able to sit on the balcony and watch a few staff members hard at work, while imaging the scenes that might have taken place in this room in the past. I remembered sitting in the cafe here with a friend a few years ago.



The features from the old courtroom overlook the Norfolk & Norwich Festival offices.

After a short pause, we moved upstairs. The first room we went into was the archive. It was interesting to see programmes from previous festivals along with other related books. I would have loved to be able to look through the materials in here in more detail.



One of many interesting items in the archive room.

The next room we went into was the courtroom where the most serious cases would have been heard. Our guides pointed out the lady of justice on the wall, which they told us had gone missing and once returned was without her scales.





Lady Justice without her scales.

As we entered we each took our places around the room. Russell was instructed to sit in the dock. We all rose when (one of the tour members posing as) the judge walked in.



Russell was put in the dock in the courtroom.

You could almost imagine what it would have been like all those years ago, but in this case the room had been in use until the 1970s, which in the scheme of things is relatively recent.

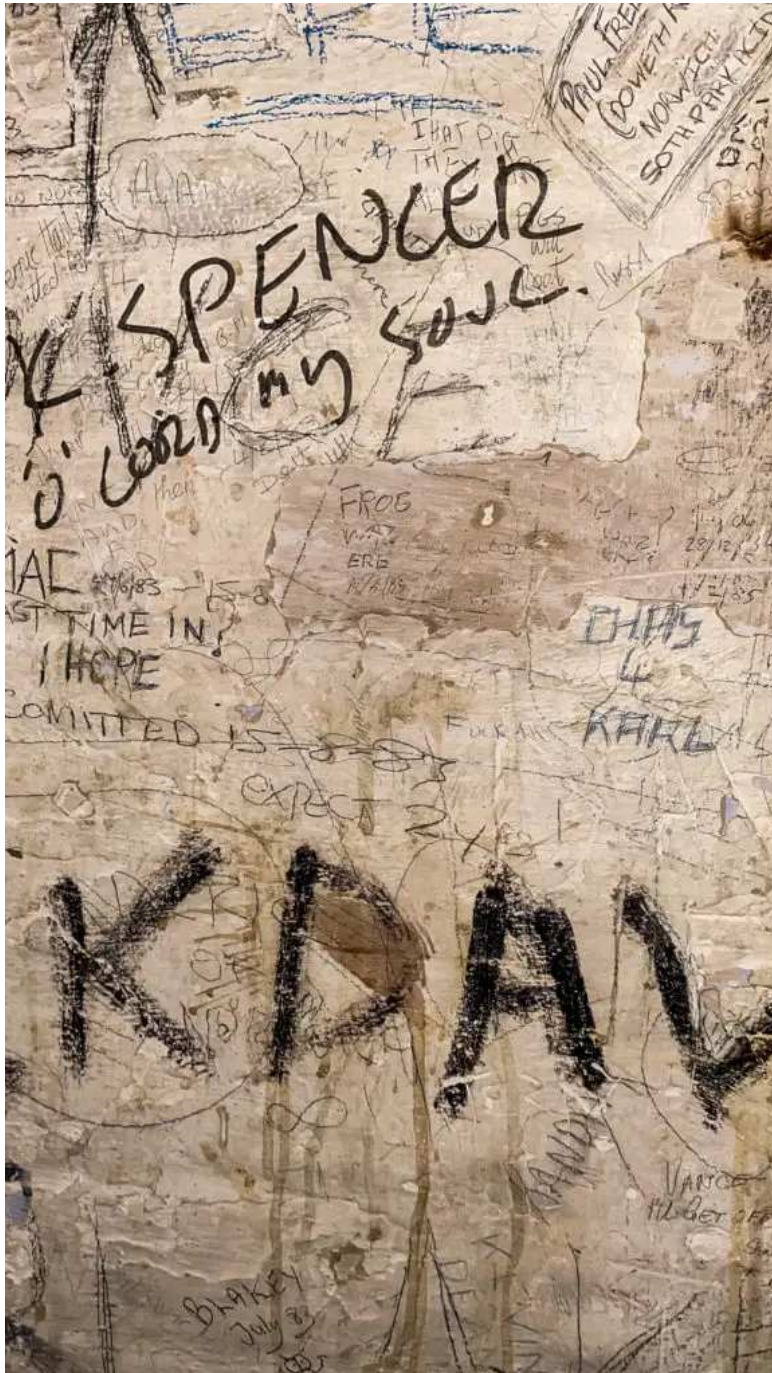
We went through the door in the back of the courtroom into a series of rooms that would have been used for meetings, offices, storage, and a chapel. While we may not have been able to see the swords or maces that are often stored here, we did get to admire the stained glass and other details.



The stained glass and woodwork dominant the room.

After returning back to the ground floor, it was time to go down to see the Gaol. We went down a ramp into the area where prisoners would have been held. It was not a place I would have wanted to spend much time. It was interesting to see the graffiti, some of which was quite recent.





It was entertaining to try and read the graffiti in the gaol.

The Gaol is not the only area to see underground. Next we needed to go down the narrow spiral stairs to the Undercroft, which also would have been used to hold prisoners.



The spiral stairs down to the undercroft were narrow and uneven.

Since there weren't any individual cells and the walls were white it didn't feel as eerie. Still we did see some graffiti including a ship and a heart. The door was also quite imposing.

We made our way back up the stairs towards where we had started. After our guides wrapped things up, I felt lucky to have had the chance to go behind the scenes in such a historic building.



The details in the building make it quite special.

## Norwich Guildhall Tour Review

"Every Step is a Different Height" is a special experience. We had access to every room in the building except for one. All the rooms were presented as they were not staged for us.



Our tour guides were volunteers who read from a script. The script was well-written and kept the tour flowing with [interesting facts](#) and a few laughs. It also makes you think about the past.

Being able to see the inside of the Guildhall was a reminder of how special our city is. [Norwich](#) truly is a "city of stories." I hope this is a Norfolk & Norwich Festival event that returns in the future.