

## RFS Kings Lynn

The theme of our Friday meeting was 'Exploring medieval King's Lynn'. Some of us had arrived in the town with only a hazy knowledge of its medieval past; Margery Kempe and the Hanseatic League were perhaps the limits of our knowledge. We were very fortunate to have as our guides Paul Richards and Jeremy Bate, two men not only very knowledgeable about their subject but who had the added attraction for their listeners of personal involvement with the history of King's Lynn. At the end of the weekend we had learnt much more than just Margery Kempe and the Hanseatic League – though both kept appearing!

Our first visit was to the chapel of St Nicholas. The first mention of St Nicholas is in the 12th century when William Turbus, Bishop of Norwich (1146–74) wrote 'In our estate of Linn, in our new land which we provided recently, for habitation ... we have erected a chapel in the name of St Nicholas.' From the beginning there was controversy,

the new chapel was not to become a parish church in its own right but to remain a chapel-of-ease dependent on the parish church of St Margaret. The parish church fought to keep its power and the financial benefits of the rights of baptism and the battle continued throughout the Middle Ages. Margery Kempe (c. 1373–post 1436) a parishioner of St Margaret's, spoke to God about St Nicholas's attempts to gain a font and reported 'Sir, said the creature [Margery Kempe to the priest of St Margaret's], dread ye not, for I understand in my soul, though they should give a bushel of nobles, they should not have it.' And she was correct; St Nicholas has now been declared redundant and is in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust. However though most of its medieval furnishings have gone it is still a fascinating 15th-century building.

The great west doors are original from c. 1400 and have been shown to have been painted on the outside since at least 1460. Inside too would have been a mass of colour and light. As well as the medieval brass eagle lectern, an



Fig. 5 The Consistory Court and table on which is carved the date 1577

unusual survival is the 'Consistory Court' made up in 1617 from older furnishings. The table bears the date 1577 (Fig. 5) and the seating seems to have been made up of pre-Reformation benches where we noticed the artificial oak graining. There are also interesting stall fronts surviving as well, of course, as the magnificent roof with its angels with outspread wings playing instruments. Among the many funerary monuments was one of perhaps special interest to RFS members; this was the freestanding, carved marble monument to Sir Benjamin Keene, ambassador to Spain, designed by Robert Adam (and of whom we later saw a portrait of Keene in the Guildhall, *Ed.*). A strong similarity has been noted between this and a wine cooler made by Chippendale to Adam's design for Harewood House, Yorkshire.

There was so much to see that we were already late for our next stop, True's Yard museum. St Nicholas, the patron saint of fishermen, was the chapel for fishermen and True's Yard is their museum. Here too we met with sea trade links and of course the Hanseatic League, a highly efficient cartel of merchants trading along the sea routes of northern Europe. From 1271 Bishops Lynn was a member of the association. In 1475 the Hanse built a new warehouse in Lynn, which we were to visit later, and traded from there until its expulsion in 1598. However, True's Yard focuses not on the League but on the hard lives of ordinary

fishermen and their families, the community known as the Northenders; indeed the backyard entrance (Fig. 6) to the museum is dominated by a restored fishing smack, *Activity*. As so often with fishing communities this was a totally enclosed community about to be completely obliterated by the developers in the 1960s. This independent museum, staffed entirely by volunteers, was founded in 1990 to save the pub, a smithy and a pair of the cottages with their bloater smokehouse. Among the many very interesting exhibits were fascinating models of the town and moving accounts of Northenders bravery in the war.

Then a walk through Tuesday Market Place, short stops at St George's Guildhall with its magnificent scissor-braced roof of sixty one trusses, the Custom House, Thorsby College and Bank House to the Holy Trinity Guildhall (the Town Hall). Our walk took place, as Margery Kempe would have described it, 'in rygth hot wedyr' but then she would have had 'a botel with bere in hir hand'. Margery's family were members of the Holy Trinity Guild so this was a particularly apt place for our final visit of the morning. The Guildhall was built in 1428 for the Guild of the Holy Trinity and its original timber ceiling only recently revealed. Of course, the hall was used for the business, music and dancing of its members of the Hanseatic League. We had come full circle.

*Ishbel Barnes*

**Fig. 6** The backyard entrance to True's Yard Museum. The two tiny houses where at one time two parents and their nine children lived in one house. Note the blue painted food hutch hanging on the wall – blue to deter flies and high up to stop rodents of all sizes

