

This is one of a series of briefing documents produced between 2005 and 2015 for Dragon Hall Volunteers. We have put them on our website as part of our plan to make available to the public as much information and archive material related to Dragon Hall as possible. The individual documents cover a range of topics related to Dragon Hall, Anyone is welcome to use or copy them, although an acknowledgement of the source would be appreciated.

The Heritage Volunteers work in partnership with Writers' Centre Norwich, the current tenants of Dragon Hall. Details of how to contact Dragon Hall Heritage Volunteers and of their activities, including talks, tours, demonstrations and performances, can be found on their website: dragonhallnorwich.org.uk

The Residents of the Old Barge Building 1841 to 1969

Before 1841

After Robert Toppes' death in 1467 the trading hall was sold and very soon sub-divided into increasingly small units. The three oriel windows on King Street were removed and a random pattern of sash and other windows was put in over the centuries; chimneys, fireplaces, stairs and attic floors were installed; cellars were dug out. The yards behind and to the south were also filled up with crowded tenements. We know most of the owners throughout this period (to be the subject of another paper in this series) but almost nothing of the residents until the first census in 1841.

1841 to 1911

The Dragon Hall building was known, at least until 1969 when the Old Barge pub closed, and probably before that, as "The Old Barge Building", after the pub at the southern end. From an analysis of the ten yearly Census data from 1841 to 1911, carried out by the Dragon Hall Research Group, we know a lot about the residents in that period, although not very much before then as they were tenants not owners.

Residents in 1841

We'll start with a snapshot of the residents in 1841. At the northern end, on St Anne's Lane, there was a lean – to building – later pulled down – and here lived Henry Selp (or Self) aged 40, a cowkeeper, with his wife, Ann, 35 and their 5 children. Next door – probably in today's Atwood Room, previously the Reception area - were Mary Wiles, 55, and her daughter. Next to them, in a sub-division, were George Plummer, 25, a joiner, his wife and two children. Then, in the next room, the one with the 16th century fireplace, was a pub, The Black Horse. The publican was Samuel Yeames, with his wife and a lodger, a carter. Next was George Hartt, 50, a boat builder, his wife and four children. Of these: George, 15, is a sailmaker and Sarah, 12, is a dressmaker. Over the years we find a few people working in river – related occupations, such as wherryman or watermen, and in 1891 we have a steam boat

engine driver. We also find a number of women working as dressmakers or seamstresses, presumably at home.

The family next to the Hartts in 1841, in a sub-division of the Old Barge Room at the southern end, is the Palmer family who are of particular interest, as Agnes aged 10 in 1841 is still here 70 years later, aged 81 in 1911, the only family member remaining. She is the only person to remain for the whole period of the Census. Most families occur in only one Census so there was a steady turnover of tenants. Agnes Palmer's father, William, is a cordwainer or leather worker and has a wife and seven children. By 1881 only Agnes and her elder sister, Elizabeth, remain, working mostly as vestmakers or tailoresses.

PALMER FAMILY in Old Barge Building

1841	1851
William PALMER 50 Cordwainer Maria 45 William 20 Samuel 20 John 15 Ellis 10 Agnes 10 Edmund 5 William LEDS 75 Ind.	William PALMER Head M 64 Cordwainer Maria Wife M 58 Elizabeth Dau 38 (?)Proof binder Alice Dau 25 Dress maker Agnes Dau 21 Edmund Son 18 Shoemaker's app. Thomas G'son 14 Scholar
1861	1871 (next to Old Barge pub)
William PALMER Hd Wid 74 Ret'd Shoem'r Elizabeth Dau S 47 Vestmaker Agnes Dau S 30 ditto Edward Son S 28 Rag merchant Emma BACKHAM Vis S 15 (?)Richard DEARING Lodger 38 Gen Lab	Elizabeth PALMER S 52 Tailoress Agnes S 38 ditto William SMITH W 48 Labourer
1881	1891 (No. 121)
Elizabeth PALMER Hd Wid 67 invalid Agnes PALMER Dau (?) 51 Tailoress	Elizabeth PALMER Hd S 78 Lodging house keep'r Agnes PALMER Si S 61 Vest maker George STAFFORD Lo S 56 Bricklayer George STOER Lo S 26 Labourer/bricklayer
1901 (No. 121 – 3 rooms)	1911 (No. 121 – 3 rooms)
Elizabeth PALMER Hd S 88 Own means Agnes PALMER Sis S 70 ditto	Agnes PALMER Hd S 81 Private means

Next to the Palmers we have a family of six, followed by – it seems – four more households, each comprising a couple and including the jobs of gardener, waterman and labourer. At the southern end was the Old Barge pub with the Harmer family with three children and no less than eight others, presumably lodgers. As there are more households than ground floor sub-divisions, it is likely that some households were in just one or two rooms on one floor only, whether on the ground floor, the first floor, i.e. in the Great Hall, or in the attics above, with considerable over-crowding.

OLD BARGE PUB: 1841 to 1871

OLD BARGE PUB – except 1841, all King Street, Norwich
Census 1841: Old Barge Yard David HARMER 45 Publican (Licensee 1836 and 1842) Elizabeth HARMER 45, plus 3 children + 8 others
Census 1851 Frederick NEWMAN 29 publican (Licensee 1850 -54) Maria NEWMAN 27, plus 3 children
Census 1861 Thomas NOCKLES 30 Clicker/shoes (Licensee 1859 – 67) Ann NOCKLES 24, plus mother, 68
Census 1871 George JOHNSON 46 Carpenter/journeyman (Licensee 4.2.1868) Etheida(?) JOHNSON , plus 2 children + aunt, 70

Occupations

Some examples of other occupations over the years are Lydia Catchpole, a pauper, in today's Old Barge Room; and a family of four in the shoe trade in 1861. The boot and shoe trade features throughout our period and reflects its growth as a major industry in Norwich well into the 20th century. Many probably worked at home on the outwork system. Other occupations include railway workers of various types such as George Blanchflower, a railway parcel deliverer. The railway arrived in Norwich in the 1840's and the station was and is today just the other side of the river. We also have a few brewery workers, probably at Morgan's brewery opposite or at the Crown Brewery at the southern end of King St., and a range of labourers, errand boys, carters etc. In 1911 in the Attwood Room area lived Michael Banger with what was probably an unusual occupation for this area; he was a portrait artist and photographic enlarger. Where he carried on his business we don't know.

Most families with children typically comprised between four and six people, with a few very large families. One of these, the Lark family, in 1881 lived in the now-demolished section at the northern end, mentioned above. William Lark kept a shop here and had eight children between the ages of ten and under one. It must have been a struggle to support such a large family on one income.

From 1851 onwards the Census gives us everyone's birthplace. An average of 93% of all residents were born in Norfolk and 77% in Norwich, an extremely high figure by national standards, indicating a population which remained rooted in its home county or city with very little inward migration. The residents of this building were of course part of a larger and probably close-knit community on the Dragon Hall site of some 150 people, the others living in two yards behind the hall and in Old Barge Yard on the south side.

Number of residents

The total number of people living in the Old Barge Building varies over the years of the census from 20 to 47, averaging 30. But if we include those families living in the yards behind, accessed from St

Anne's Lane, and those in Old Barge Yard to the south, we have totals of between 130 and 165 people living in crowded conditions in or close to the Old Barge Building.

After 1911

Ironically, we have almost no information about the residents after 1911, at least until about 1945, much less than we have from the Census for the earlier decades. It seems very likely that they followed much the same sort of pattern of families and employment. (The book called "Hard Up Street" gives a vivid picture of the working class community of King Street in the first half of the 20th century). The biggest change for the Dragon Hall residents before the outbreak of war in 1939 would have been the Slum Clearance programme of 1937 which swept away all the buildings behind Dragon Hall and in the yards in St Anne's Lane and Old Barge Yard, with the exception of the existing 19th century cottage now adjacent to the north wing built in 200/06.



The Old Barge Building in 1943

There is an extant 1943 photo of Dragon Hall - or the Old Barge Building, as it was known to the residents - boarded up and almost derelict. This could be related to at least one unconfirmed account of Dragon Hall being damaged in the Norwich Blitz of 1942. We know that by 1952 the northern end of the building was occupied by Swatman's butchers and that the family or employees lived in the rooms above. In the middle section of the building, also by 1952, possibly earlier, was the rectory of St Peter Parmentergate and St Julian. The last rector, Father Sear, moved out in about 1972. At the southern end of the building the Old Barge pub continued until closure in 1969.



Swatman's butcher's shop

THE FAMILIES and CONFIGURATION of DRAGON HALL (Old Barge Building) working backwards from today to 1891

DRAGON HALL 111 – 123 King Street							
House No.	(111)	113	115	117	119	121	123
TODAY (2010)	Demolished 1937	Atwood Room (previously Reception/ 'Butcher's Shop'/'Schoolroom')	Atwood Room	Coetzee Room (previously Display Rm. 2/ 'Vicarage Rm.')	Smith Room (previously Display Rm.,3/ 'Vicarage Rm.')	Old Barge Room	
1950's/ 1960's	(Demolished 1937)	Swatman's butchers		St.Julian + St Peter Vicarage	Vicarage	Old Barge pub	
CENSUS 1911 Family	Lark	Banger	Cullum	Hollingsworth	Gibson	Palmer	Robinson (Old Barge)
People	7	2	2	3	2	1	6
Rooms	5	3	2	4	4	3	9
CENSUS 1891 Family	Shop + Cooper (above)	Green	Butcher	Golder	Wilson	Palmer	Gibson (Old Barge)



A SMALL CONUNDRUM:

In this George Plunkett photo of 1935 the last door on the right is the Old Barge (No. 123). Therefore the door two places to the left of it (Smith Room) must be No. 119 but today it has the number "117" on it. Was the number moved from 117 – next left – for the post-war Vicarage which occupied Nos. 117 and 119?

