

# The Strangers of Norwich

MUSEUM of  
NORWICH  
*at the Bridewell*

## Who were they?

The Strangers first arrived in Norfolk in the 14th century. They came from the Low Countries and were initially met with mistrust by the local population, some were even treated as if they were smugglers. Many of the Strangers were weavers and they came to form one of three guilds of cloth makers working within Norwich. Each guild had their own seal which was stamped onto their cloth; a castle if made in the city, a lion if made in the county, and a ship if made by the Strangers.

By the 1570s over 4000 refugees had settled in Norwich fleeing the religious persecution they faced in their homelands for their Protestant beliefs. Among them was a second group of Strangers consisting of 24 Dutchman and 6 Walloons. The group were invited to settle in Norwich by the civic authorities in order to help revive the failing cloth industry.

## Why were the Strangers important to Norwich?

When the Strangers arrived in Norwich, they brought with them their own tools and material and taught the local people their weaving techniques. They even took on some of the local people as apprentices which helped build the local economy. Thanks to their weaving skills, Norwich's weaving industry was revitalised and our reputation for fine cloth lasted into the 19th century. A piece that they made as a thank you still hangs in St Peter Mancroft Church, which has the date of when it was woven in 1573.

## What impact did the Strangers have on modern day Norwich?

We can see the impact of the Strangers throughout Norwich in the Dutch style architecture of many of our buildings. Thanks to the wealth generated by the thriving weaving industry, Norfolk also has one of the largest concentrations of medieval churches in the world. Not only that, the Strangers brought with them their pet canaries which, in case you did not know, became the logo for Norwich City Football Club!

Perhaps most importantly, Norwich is now recognised as a City of Sanctuary, which celebrates what the citizens of Norwich bring to the city and the hospitality that we offer new arrivals. The City of Sanctuary is formed from a coalition of local refugee groups and community representatives who aim to promote a culture of welcome and sanctuary.

The Strangers were an integral part of our city and helped shaped it into what it is today. Many citizens of Norfolk can trace their ancestry back to the Dutch and Flemish refugees who settled in the city. To many people, we may be the city that's in the bump in Britain, but to this group of refugees, we became their home.

