

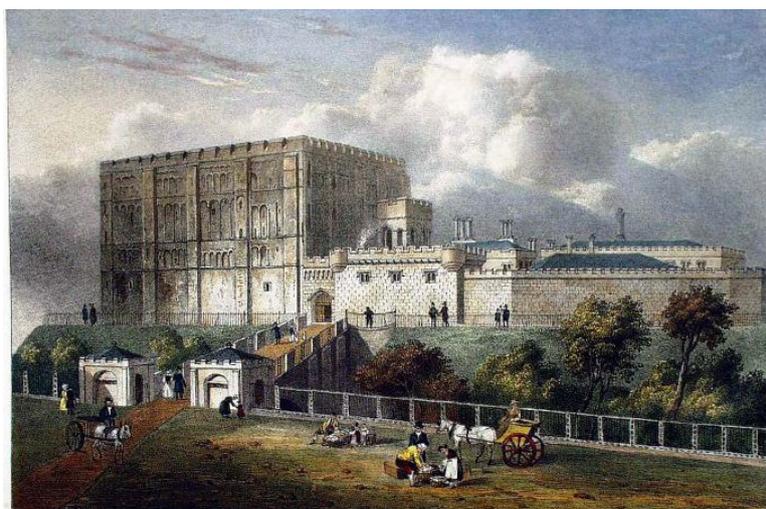
## From Prison to Museum

Norwich Castle was built as a symbol of royal domination by the Normans over the local Anglo-Saxon population. Its huge structure, placed on the large motte in the centre of the city, continued to exercise a profound visual affect on the local population over the centuries as a powerful symbol of civic pride. It was frequently engraved by artists and despite being a prison holding thieves, villains and debtors only a wall's thickness away, was a popular venue for city folk to walk around. The following account reveals the pleasure taken in this, following the completion of William Wilkins' rebuilding:

The works of the New County Gaol are now nearly arrived at a state of completion. And the walk round the Castle Hill having, after a long interval of unavoidable exclusion, been thrown open again to the public, was visited on Sunday last, by throngs of persons: all apparently eager to enjoy the salutary pleasures of a favourite *promenade*. With too lively remembrance of *what it was*, before the platform of the Hill exhibited such formidable encroachments of stone masonry, we yet were gratified with the neatness of the general arrangement, and the means which it still affords of viewing the city and surrounding country.

From *The Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>  
November 1834 (Vol LVII No.2894)

This is shown in David Hodgson's coloured lithograph of the Castle made some time after Wilkins' prison was built. People are shown wandering around the mound with its iron railings, which are still in place today.



Often the steady stream of images of the Castle would be advertised locally:

**JUST PUBLISHED,**  
**A Lithographic Print, on Imperial Paper,**  
 OF THE  
**West Front of the Norwich Castle,**  
 FROM A  
**DRAWING BY FRANCIS STONE,**  
*Architect and County Surveyor.*

To be had of MR. WM. FREEMAN, London Street.  
**PRICE 6s.**

**T**HIS PRINT is a Specimen of a Work proposed to be Published by Subscription, in Three Parts—each Part to contain Five Impressions, forming in the whole Fifteen Sheets of Plans, Elevations, and Sections, which will be more fully described in future advertisements.

*Note.*—The Castle was erected by Roger Bigod, in the reign of William the Conqueror. It is supposed to have been built on the foundation of a Castle erected by Alfred the Great. In 1325 the Sessions were directed to be held here; and in 1399 it was made the Public Gaol for the County, &c.—*Vide Blomefield's and Grose's Antiquities.* (951)

From *The Norwich Mercury*, Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March 1834 (No. 5369)

Despite this obvious importance of the Castle in the cultural and civic mind of Norwich people, the building was still an operating prison. The needs of the building, and its maintenance and upkeep, were ongoing causes of concern

to the local Magistrates and the Prison Governor, John Johnson. The potential conflict between these two viewpoints was felt most clearly when it was decided that the Castle's main outer walls were in need of restoration in 1834. The repairs, which were carried out, caused a local outcry as the following pieces from local paper *The Norwich Mercury* reveal:

TO STONE-MASONS.

**I**T is intended to restore the South and West sides of the NORWICH CASTLE with the best Combe-Down Bath Stone, beginning with the South side. Such Persons as are willing to Contract for the execution of the Work are desired to affix the Prices according to the following directions—viz.

To prepare and fix all the Ashlar and Bond Stones of such scantlings as will be given by the Architect (Mr. Francis Stone) as the work proceeds, at per foot Cube.

To prepare and fix all the Circular Arches with Cogging and other Moldings, also the Columns and Bases, according to the Models which may be seen at the Castle, inclusive of making Wood Patterns and Centres, at per foot Cube.

To prepare and fix the String Courses and Plinths, which are to be sawn out of hard block Yorkshire Stone, worked according to the Models in such Scantlings as will be given as the work proceeds, at per foot Cube.

N. B.—The Mortar for setting the Stone Work will be provided at the expense of the County.

To take off the present Battlements and Parapet to the South side, including one Battlement to the West, which are to be repaired and refixed; also to take down and remove off the Castle Hill, all the outer defective Stone Facing & Flint Work from the Parapet to the ground of the South front, including the first Butress towards the West; the materials to be the property of the Contractor for the sum of £

To erect a good and substantial Scaffold for the whole of the work to the South side, including the first Butress and Staircase towards the West; and the Contractor to find, at his own expense, all Ropes, Tackle, Tools, &c. necessary to complete the South front, including the first Butress towards the West; also to Hoard (or Bumble) off the Hill, and to provide Shops for the Workmen, according to a Plan which may be seen at the Castle.

Tenders to be sealed and directed to the Chairman of the Castle Committee, and delivered on or before Friday, May 16th, 1834. (1353)

From *The Norwich Mercury*, Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1834 (No. 5374)

At a meeting of the Castle Committee for restoring the South and West Sides of that ancient edifice, held on Saturday last, Mr Watson's tender for performing that contract was accepted.

From *The Norwich Mercury*, Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May 1834 (No. 5377)

#### RESTORATION OF THE CASTLE.

To the Rate Payers of the County of Norfolk.  
GENTLEMEN,

Your attention will naturally be drawn to a requisition on the subject of the Castle, published in this week's paper, and as there are perhaps many among you who may imagine that the inhabitants of Norwich have no right to interfere with what rests between you and the County Magistrates, I beg leave as briefly as I can, to state to you the grounds on which that requisition has been drawn up, and so respectfully and I may add influentially signed.

Not a stone of the exterior of the West and South sides of the Castle will in a few months remain, if the resolutions lately passed on the subject are carried into effect. All that we ask therefore, in the first place, is—whether this act of demolition be necessary? It can only be necessary on one of two grounds—that the Castle walls will fall unless they are new faced, or that what remains of the old facing cannot be kept up by partial repair and restoration of what is already gone. Now the safety of the walls has little or nothing to do with the subject. The plea on which the measure is adopted, is, that the exterior facing will in the progress of time crumble away, leaving only the bare walls remaining, and that it is already too far gone to be kept up by any means whatever.

Before, therefore, we see so noble a relic defaced, we are anxious to know on what professional authority so sweeping a measure is adopted, and as from the circumstances under which that authority has been derived, we are deprived of the satisfaction of knowing it—we request a meeting to be called, for the purpose of adopting measures to induce the County Magistrates either to have a professional opinion professionally given by a competent antiquary, architect, and mason, or to allow us to have one, in order that we may be assured that competent and responsible judges venture to assert that what remains cannot be kept up by a restoration of what has fallen.

One of four measures is possible:—1. To leave it as it is. 2. To restore what is gone, and thus to preserve what remains. 3. To restore it to its ancient form, character, and construction, by a new facing. 4. To pull down the present facing entirely, and make a nominal restoration like the East side.

Now, gentlemen, and I say this equally to the county magistrates and to yourselves, every subscribing member to our requisition would prefer the first of these measures to the last; & not our requisitionists only, but I believe every person in the kingdom at all impressed with the characteristic features of the original structure. It is true that the first may be deemed an ultra-antiquarian view, but we deem the last an ultra-vandal one. We seek to ascertain whether the second measure cannot be adopted, and to know that on competent authority; we do not wish to have so noble and interesting a feature in our city destroyed, merely because nameless persons have informed the Committee that it must be so. If however in the end it should turn out, as it possibly may, that entire restoration is essential, let us have a real and not merely a nominal one. Let any person walk up to the Castle and turn his eye from the flat bare piece of masonry that faces Thorpe to the rich work of the remaining South side, and satisfy himself whether the former be or be not a restoration in the style of the latter. This is not a matter of antiquarian knowledge, (I, for one, profess none) but simply of observation. We have been ac-

customed from our childhood to admire the (as it were) Mosaic appearance of the Anglo Norman Keep, & we have in its stead a piece of even modern masonry as unlike in its structure and appearance to the original edifice, as if it had been faced with Roman cement. The dimensions of the walls and parts are probably the same as in their original state, but the structure of that wall is essentially different. If any of you had a fine old piece of brickwork crumbling away, you would not say, because a contractor to restore it had kept to the original design of your building, but instead of using small bricks had employed square pavements, that he had restored your old piece of masonry, and if that masonry were connected with the history of your building, and the building connected with the history of your family, you would surely, if after every enquiry, you were reduced to the necessity of reconstructing it, and if one side only were refaced with your pavements, you would I say have the remaining three sides restored with brick work as nearly as possible assimilated to what had to be taken down. Now read, "blocks of stone" for "bricks," and "country" for "family," and you have the case in point. In what has been done the characteristic feature of the old structure, namely the small square blocks distinctly visible and pervading the whole facing, is entirely lost; and hence it is merely a nominal restoration; it is a thing which if one of the original builders had seen he would have taken for fairy work, so perfectly unlike is it to any performance of his. It is on these grounds that we sincerely trust that should competent judges unfortunately decide that it can in no manner be preserved, the edifice will either be allowed to remain as it is, or be restored stone for stone.

Surely then, Gentlemen, when we see so interesting a relic beginning to be destroyed, without, as far as we know, any competent authority for the necessity of such a step, we cannot be charged with improper interference in acting as we do. It is not merely a concern of ours, or yours, but it is really to a certain extent a national concern, that so noble a monument of antiquity should not be brought piece-meal down, with spike and pick-axe, without a responsible authoritative statement that it cannot be preserved; and surely again we are doubly justified in instituting this enquiry, when we see that the new work is commenced on precisely the same plan as the wholesale modernized masonry of the nondescript East side.

I am, Gentlemen, your obedient humble servant,  
*A Subscriber to the Requisition.*  
Norwich, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1834.

From *The Norwich Mercury*, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July 1834 (No. 5386)

A meeting was held in pursuance of the requisition, on Monday last, relative to the restoration now going on at the Castle. It was attended only by about twenty persons, probably in consequence of the Assize business. THE MAYOR presided. THE DEPUTY MAYOR, after a few remarks regretting any defacement of that venerable building, moved the following resolution—

That this meeting feeling much interest in the preservation (as far as possible) in its ancient state of that characteristic feature of the city of Norwich, *its Castle*, and viewing with feelings of regret the commenced demolition of its west and south facings, and erection of a new building, entreats the Gaol Committee, before the work be further proceeded with, to have the opinion of an Antiquary, an Architect, and a Mason, respectively, as to whether or not such a step be necessary. And the meeting begs further to suggest that such opinions be given by persons unconnected with the execution of the work, and that as the matter is one of *public interest*, such opinions should be *published*.

Which was seconded by ALD. STEVENSON, who supported it at some length.

THE REV. E. DANIEL proposed the second resolution—

That should such professional opinion unfortunately decide that any one or more of the three sides (the north for example) can only be rendered secure by an entirely new facing, enquiry be also made of such competent persons, as to the possibility and propriety of erecting that facing according to its original construction; as the meeting views with additional regret, that the new work is commenced in a manner dissimilar to the construction and character of the original masonry, and thus in one important particular rendering the work imperfect as a restoration, as it is in another deficient in durability. And read a letter from Dawson Turner, Esq. of Yarmouth, of which the following is a part—

“In my opinion the Castle ought unquestionably to be left standing if possible as it now is. There is not in all Normandy, and I believe there is not in the whole world, an equally beautiful example of castellated architecture of the same style and era; to meddle with it, therefore, at all, unless it is actually likely to fall, is unquestionably to be deprecated. In case support is necessary, I should trust that to replace what is gone, and thus to preserve what remains, may, as the next best step, be resorted to—any thing else I should exceedingly lament. I am very seldom in Norwich, and I am not much a reader of newspapers, I had therefore no idea of (what I infer from your letter) its being in contemplation to make the south and west sides of the Castle similar to what we now see on the east. Such a step I should indeed consider an abomination, and I trust it will never be resorted to.”

Mr. D. said an attempt (commenced since the requisition) to make the new structure appear, by false joints, what it was not, had demonstrated the absurdity of the original plan, inasmuch as it reduced the mason to the necessity of filling up half every real perpendicular joint with cement, in order to conceal it, which cement would in a few years fall out, and then have to be put in again—when there would be a fresh job for the county and fresh scaffolding over the Castle. Now he maintained that such work was imperfect as a restoration and deficient in durability—and all might have been avoided by cutting the blocks of stone in another form. But in addition to this, even in placing the joints, whether real or false, some more taste ought to be displayed than in the part begun, in order to give the irregularity of the original style, where there was no original remains to go by. A person, who besides being a Norman Antiquarian was an Artist, like Mr. Cotman, ought to have designed the divisions.

MR. BARWELL supported the resolution.

The third resolution was proposed by MR. BRIGHTWELL—

That a deputation of three or more gentlemen be appointed to wait on Colonel Harvey, the Chairman of the Gaol Committee, and express to him the feelings and wishes of the meeting on this subject, with a view to their being communicated by that gentleman to the Members of the said Committee.

MR. J. G. JOHNSON and the REV. J. TOMPSON objected to the resolutions, upon each of which a long and rather conversational discussion ensued between Mr. Alderman Stevenson, Mr. Brightwell, Mr. J. G. Johnson, the Rev. E. Daniel, and the Rev. J. Tompson. Mr. F. Stone, the architect of the Castle, defended the works going on at the Castle, which he stated to be perfectly in keeping with the original Anglo-Norman Architecture. He contended that the size of the stone used had nothing to do with the style of architecture, which depended on the solidity, the form of the arch, column, &c. and that great danger was now incurred from the almost daily falling of the stones. The resolutions were carried.

*To the Editor of the Norwich Mercury.*

SIR,

You will oblige me by inserting the following observations in your valuable Journal:

NORWICH CASTLE.

I am one among the many who regret the demolition of so ancient a structure, inestimable for its antiquity and for the characteristic style of architecture it bears, namely, pure Norman, (not Anglo-Norman.) Many of the edifices erected in this country since the conquest partake of the mixed style of Saxon and Norman; the Saxons having possession of this country before the conquest, erected many sacred buildings and buildings for defence, in their peculiar style of architecture, which the Normans were not acquainted with when they first made the conquest, but after a considerable lapse of time they introduced parts and portions of the Saxon style with their own (which I term Anglo-Norman.) It appears from very indisputable authority that Norwich Castle is a building of unknown antiquity, or at least as remote as the invasion of this country by the Romans; from that circumstance and from its constructive principle I am induced to believe it to be a Roman structure; the Romans, when in possession of this country, were continually harassed by the Aborigines and their allies, consequently they built their structures for defence and opposition hastily, and with such materials as this country readily afforded them, namely, pebbles and flint stones, which could be got together in much less time and expence than sinking quarries for rock stone at a great distance from the site of the building. With such materials we know the whole of the massive walls of the Castle and other Roman remains were built, which by a proper admixture of lime and sharp sand therewith became a concrete in a short time, and by induration an inseparable mass. Such a building I have no doubt the Normans under the Conquest found Norwich Castle, which in the reign of William Rufus was faced and decorated with Caen stone, wrought in the pure Norman style of architecture (which its boltels, semi-circular arches, roll mouldings, reticulated ashlaring, and its dressings in general still exhibit), and although its surface is much corroded by the action of the atmosphere thereon for many centuries, still its strength and durability are not in the least deteriorated or affected thereby—its ornamental surface might have been with care repaired, renovated, and coloured, in such manner as not to be distinguished from the original, first filling up the fissures and disjoinings in the general mass of concrete work with Roman cement, and wedging them with strong rag slates in a proper manner, so as to unite the several now disjoined parts, and connect them in one general mass again. But the work of demolition and restoration which is now in progress, however so minutely and exactly copied, cannot have the appearance of antiquity, for which *alone* it is now a valuable object; it will be no longer called and regarded by the designation of *Norwich Old Castle*, but every antiquarian and lover of the arts will deplore its loss, and for ever execrate the barbarism committed thereon, which they could not have anticipated would have taken place in this enlightened age—a barbarism which the promoters thereof themselves I hope in due time will deprecate, and desist therefrom, otherwise they merit severe reprehension.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
W.M. HINSBEY, *Architect, Norwich.*

From *The Norwich Mercury*, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August 1834 (No. 5388)

Given the importance of the Castle to the City, its conversion to a Museum was a natural suggestion, providing a civic amenity reflecting the history and sense of place Norwich had. We are very fortunate to have a series of photographs showing the Castle as a prison at its closure, and of the progress of the building works from 1887 to 1894.



Now you see it... The Keep with its brick cell blocks built by Sir John Soane (*above*) and following their demolition (*below*)





Modern arches, designed to look Norman like the Keep, were inserted to hold up the new roof, and a wooden walkway inserted around the edge





Following the grand opening of the Castle Museum by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) in October 1894 new staff had to be appointed as attendants. This picture shows those working in 1897 (left to right): W Jarvis; H Wurr; E Palmer; W Benns Palmer: Seated, J Nunn (joiner) and E Bacon (stoker). Jarvis, in the top hat, was the doorman

