

WALKING

CROME'S NORWICH 1821 2021

A self-guided trail of Crome's city



John Crome lived and worked in Norwich all his life. From humble beginnings he became a drawing master and was one of the principal founders of the Norwich Society of Artists. He remains one of the country's great Romantic painters, rooting his work in the local landscape.

During the first lockdown of 2020, local photographer Nick Stone followed in Crome's footsteps, walking the deserted city streets exploring Crome's Norwich and pinpointing the painter's locations and capturing them with a fresh eye. This walk takes you to places Crome would have known and visits some of the locations he painted.

John Crome was born in 1768 in The Griffin pub close to Norwich Cathedral. The son of a weaver, born at a time when the city was at the centre of an important international trade in textiles. In the 1780s over thirty different trades associated with textiles were located in the noisy and colourful area known as 'Norwich Over the Water', north of the River Wensum. The river formed the artery for the textile industry, and the warehouses, dyers' premises and quays were well known to Crome and featured frequently in his works.

Norwich at the time was known for radical politics, and inns and taverns in the city were home to societies and clubs where ideas were shared, and debates were held. The Rifleman pub hosted 'The Dirty Shirt Club' where men could go in working clothes, to drink, smoke and socialise.

Crome was not a prolific artist. He earned his living primarily as a drawing master, following an apprenticeship as a coach and sign painter. He taught at what is now Norwich School in the grounds of the Cathedral and gave private lessons to some notable Norwich families. These included the influential Gurney family, founders of Gurney's bank which eventually became Barclays.

Crome died two centuries ago in 1821. His grave and memorial are in St Georges Church in Colegate. The Crome ward covering the Heartsease area of the city is named after him, as is Crome's Broad just north of Horning.

John Crome and his friend, and fellow painter, Robert Ladbroke founded the Norwich Society of Artists in 1803. It is not known from whom the idea came, but their increased involvement with local patrons of the arts, artists and their families led to the inevitable formation of a society akin to many that were flourishing in Norwich at the time.

The group had an open-door policy, and none were turned away who had an interest in or

inclination towards art. The only criteria to join were submitting an artwork, and securing a place via a ballot of existing members. By 1805, the Society had enough pieces of art to present their first exhibition, hosted at Sir Benjamin Wrench's Court which was also to become the home of the Society.

John Crome assumed the presidency of the Society several times and was incumbent upon his death in 1821. The Society continued until it was officially closed by John Sell Cotman in 1834. Following the conclusion of the Society, many former members and their pupils continued to paint and exhibit. The influence from the Norwich Society was apparent in their works and so the term 'Norwich School' was coined.

The Norwich School's style reflected British landscape art moving away from European (especially Italian) influences. The previously favoured hot, burnt brown palettes were replaced with the verdant greens actually seen in the Norfolk countryside. John Crome and the Society advocated painting by 'looking only to nature', a statement that was announced in the catalogues of the Society's exhibitions.

An exhibition of over ninety works, A Passion for Landscape: Rediscovering John Crome is at Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery until 5th September.

This walk is approximately 3½ miles or 5.5 kms. There are no steep slopes or steps but there are some busy roads. One section has an alternative route for those who wish to walk a green path through Train Wood – this has some challenging terrain and may be overgrown. This small section is not suitable for people with mobility or sensory issues.

The route

Starting at The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell, head to the top of the alley. Turn left and walk up London Street towards Bank Plain, cross the road and continue along Queen Street until you reach Tombland.

1. Across the road on the corner of Tombland and Upper King Street is **the site of The Griffin public house**. John Crome was born here in 1768, on what was then called Conisford Street in the quarter known as Castle Ditches. Records show that the building dated back to at least 1603. It was demolished when Prince of Wales Road was constructed in 1860.

Cross the road and continue through St Ethelreda's Gate into Cathedral Close, continue walking until you reach the green, then turn left and walk until you see a small car park on you left next to the refectory.

2. This is the site of the **Cathedral's Monastic Infirmary**. Crome drew the building being demolished in 1804. Six piers which were part of the south face of the Infirmary Hall are still visible to the side of the car park. These appear in his work. Crome would have sat on the green to sketch out this scene.

Cross the car park to the corner and continue down a short alley, turn right, walk towards St Ethelreda's Gate, turn right before you reach it and walk along the path until you reach the Erpingham Gate.

3. This is **The Norwich School**. Crome was the drawing master here for many years, teaching other notable artists such as James Stark and Edward Thomas Daniell.

Leave the Cathedral grounds via the Erpingham Gate into Tombland. Turn right and cross the road towards the Maids Head Hotel and continue along Wensum Street and then across Fye Bridge. On your left is the Church of St Clement Colgate. Cross the road to St Clements Alley, where there is a flint building on the left.

4. In 1796 **John Crome taught sketching here to Master Sparshall**, the son of the Quaker wine merchant. The house was previously the residence of Alexander Thurston, 17th century Mayor and MP. *Walk along the alley to the rear of the churchyard and turn right, and when you reach the road turn left into Colegate. Walk west and then turn right into*

Calvert Street. Continue along Calvert street until you reach the junction with Cross Lane. Across the road is a building with a blue plaque on the front.

5. This was **The Rifleman Pub**. John Crome drank here as a member of the 'Dirty Shirt Club'. They smoked pipes and discussed the matters of the day. The name originates in the textiles industry – workers would meet in pubs to collect their pay.



Continue along Calvert Street until you reach the Ring Road and turn left and walk to the head of St Georges Street.

6. In 1800, this was the site of **John Crome's house** on what was then Gildengate Street in a terrace. Gildengate Street originally ran from Botolph Street to St Andrews. It was eventually renamed St Georges Street and was bisected by the ring-road in the 1960s. His house was demolished at the end of the 19th century and replaced by a new terrace which was pulled down in 1962. A plaque was recovered bearing the words 'John Crome - Old Crome, 1768-1821, Founder of the Norwich School of Painters, Lived in a House on this Site'. This is now in the possession of the Museum of Norwich.

Turn left into St Georges Street and walk back up towards Colegate.

7. On the corner you will find **the Church of St George Colegate**. This rather handsome building was at the heart of John Crome's parish. It is usually unlocked during the day, so you should be able to go inside – a light and airy space full of interesting items, including fragments of Medieval wall paintings, tombs to Mayors of Norwich and Regency and Victorian items. In the south aisle is a memorial to John Crome, who was both baptised and buried here in the church where he was a warden. It bears the inscription – 'One of England's



2 Demolition of Norwich Cathedral Infirmery
John Crome, c1804.
 NWHCM : 1922.135.886



9 Norwich River Afternoon
John Crome, c1819.
 NWHCM 1994.1.89



11 The River Wensum
John Crome, c1814.
 ©Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



10 St Martin's Gate
John Crome, c1812.
 NWHCM 1955.170.



12 Back of New Mills
John Crome, c.1814–1817.
 NWHCM 1899.4.2.



13 New Mills Men Wading
John Crome, c.1812.
 NWHCM : 1970.531.

Key to the Map

- Location of point of interest
- Location of painting or drawing
- Main route
- Side route with poor accessibility

greatest landscape painters' and features a relief portrait of Crome with a wreath above his head, and his palette and brushes below.



Leaving the church continue walking along Colegate and cross Duke Street at the pedestrian crossing. Turn right and walk along Duke Street until you reach the junction, then turn left into St Marys Plain.

8. Opposite is the **Church of St Mary Coslany**. This is the last surviving complete, original medieval round tower church in Norwich. It was here that John Crome married Phoebe Berney in October 1792, a marriage that resulted in 8 children, two of whom went on to become landscape painters – John Berney Crome and William Henry Crome.

Continue across St Marys Plain and turn right onto Oak Street. At the end of Oak Street cross the dual carriageway using the pedestrian crossing next to the bridge. Walk towards the roundabout and turn right towards the entrance to Train Wood. This is the start of Marriott's Way and the site of the former Norwich City Station. Follow the footpath north towards the trees.

9. To your right on the opposite bank is the location of Crome's 1819 painting '**Norwich River Afternoon**'. Oak Street was lined with tenements, yards, houses and workshops. Nothing recognisable remains of this riverside scene except the line of the river bank itself. The buildings were either removed in slum clearances, damaged during the war or subsequently demolished.

Where Crome sat to paint this scene was once scrubby marshland with trees known as the 'bleaching ground', here textiles were laid out to whiten in the sun. It is now nature-rich wet woodland. Hints of its railway heritage still lurk beneath the trees.

Continue walking along the footpath.

There is a split in the path here next to some seats and a piece of the railway equipment. The path might be only partially accessible and can get very overgrown in the summer with hidden uneven surfaces. Please be aware of this. Access is inadvisable for anyone with mobility or sensory issues.

10. If you choose to take the riverside path you can see the location of the Painting. '**St Martin's Gate**' (pictured below) which Crome painted from this bank in 1812. The arch depicted in the painting is not the city gate; the building differs from those seen in Ninham's and Kirkpatrick's drawings. It seems likely that the title is the name given to the area. This archway probably stood at the top of the slope on St Martins Road that led down to the Fuller's House or Fuller's Hole, which now leads to St Martin's Close and Tanner's Court.



The 16th century building in the painting was once owned by Alderman Henry Fuller, Mayor of Norwich. The area was a popular subject for many other painters including his son John Berney Crome. The house itself was demolished in the 1930s.

Turning back along the path, head back to the roundabout. Turn left and then cross the carriageways at the pedestrian crossing. Turn right and cross the bridge onto Barn Road and continue along the riverside path towards Westwick Street car park. Walk down the small spur in the path towards the back of New Mills. Stop near the trees and look back across the river towards the bridge,

11. This is approximately where Crome painted '**The River Wensum**' around 1814. An area of industrial and residential buildings in courts and yards, often named after the pubs which studded this historically working-class area. The last were mostly removed during the 1930s and 1950s. At the back of the painting is what appears to be the dye works. It appears to be vented by high shuttering

perhaps to relieve the heat and chemical vapours. Turn around to face the rear of New Mills, advance by no more than a few metres.

12. This is also the location where John Crome painted '**Back of the New Mills**' at some time between 1814–1817. This area has been the location of water mills since at least the 15th century. The building you see in Crome's work was built in 1710 as a corn mill. It was replaced in 1897 and used to produce compressed air to drive tools at both the college and corporation yard. It is now redundant. The flaking stucco of the dormer and the hints of dilapidation indicate a poor area. Luxury riverside housing is a recent development.

Turning round, head back towards Barn Road, turn left and then continue, again turning left into Westwick Street. Head a hundred metres until you reach New Mills Yard. Turn left again and walk to the river's edge.

13. Looking downstream is the location where in 1812 Crome painted '**New Mills Men Wading**'. The scene has changed dramatically, only the line of the river and a concrete echo of the inlet or mooring point seen in the painting remain. The shuttering and concreting of the banks means the river cuts deeper. You couldn't wade here now as the men do. The houses were built much closer to the river's edge and block the view of Norwich Castle. This area has seen a lot of residential development in the last 40 years. The distant bridge, built in 1804, is no longer visible due to the higher banks.

Turn around and walk back, turning left onto Westwick Street. Cross the road and walk to the junction of St Margarets Street. Walk up the slight hill past the church and turn left onto St Benedicts Street. Continue walking to Charing Cross and onto St Andrews Street. Stop outside Stranger's Hall.

14. Part of the front of Stranger's Hall was the home



of sculptor **Pellegrino Mazzotti** who produced a bust of John Crome. There is blue plaque on the wall which references this.

Continue walking along St Andrews Street past the entrance to Maddermarket Street. Just before you get to Exchange Street there is a small gated alleyway

15. This is believed to be the location of **The Hole in the Wall pub**. The Norwich Society of Artists meetings took place here from 1803. The building was built into the chancel of the Church of St. Crowche, most of which had been demolished in the 16th century. The pub was demolished around 1838. The freestone inclusions in the wall of the building to the left hand side of the alley are the only visible remains.



Turn right into Exchange Street, continue up the road until you reach London Street. Turn left at Jarrolds and then turn left at the end of the store into Little London Street.

16. This rather featureless side street was the location of **Sir Benjamin Wrench Court**, the earliest Norwich Society exhibitions were held here. The site was cleared in 1826 to make way for the Corn Exchange.

At the bottom of Little London Street turn right and walk up Bedford Street until you reach Bridewell Alley.



Sir Benjamin Wrench's Court by Henry Ninham
NWHCM : 1929.89.42

CROME'S NORWICH 1821 2021

MUSEUM of
NORWICH
at the Bridewell

The exhibitions

A Passion for Landscape: Rediscovering John Crome

17 May - 5 September 2021

Norwich Castle

Celebrating one of Britain's great Romantic artists. The first major exhibition dedicated to John Crome since 1968, it provides a long-overdue opportunity to rediscover this important artist, reinstating Crome's national reputation by re-evaluating his role in the history of British landscape painting.

The exhibition features approximately 90 paintings, watercolours, drawings and etchings. Alongside Norwich Castle's pre-eminent collection of works by John Crome, the exhibition will present loans from private and public collections, including Tate, the V&A and Fitzwilliam Museum.

Somewhere Unexpected: Norwich Castle Open Art Show

17 May - 12 September 2021

Timothy Gurney Gallery, Norwich Castle

Contemporary artists based in East Anglia to respond to our new relationship with landscape forged over the past twelve months. From an open call, work by 38 artists was selected.

Crome's Norwich - 1821 & 2021

22 May - 18 September 2021

Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell



Crome's Norwich - 1821 & 2021 at Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell takes a closer look at Crome's Norwich, then and now. Local photographer Nick Stone has walked in the footsteps of John Crome, along riverbanks and city paths to revisit the locations which inspired him. The result is a collection of stunning images, which blend Crome's works with contemporary photography, bringing the story of Crome's Norwich up to date.

For further information on opening times and how to book tickets please visit www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk



ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Norfolk County Council

