

## The Magazine (Newarke)

The Magazine is located at the western end of Newarke Street. The building, circa 1410, is a medieval gateway added to Leicester Castle by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Leicester. It is a Grade I listed building.



Built in soft Dane Hills sandstone the Magazine has three floors. The ground floor, and possibly first floor, was first used as the porter's lodge for the Newarke College and as accommodation for his family and servants. The second floor, which spans the arch and is twice the size of the other floors, was guest quarters for high status visitors to the College. A massive centre post with three braces supports the ceiling of the ground floor room. The slots in the centre beam mark the position of a timber and plaster screen which used to divide the room.

The outer door at the foot of the stairs is typical of those inserted when the building had a military use. At the same time the windows were covered by steel shutters with loopholes.

The first floor has a small doorway in one corner leading to a garderobe, a medieval toilet. It has a drainage shaft which is joined by another from the floor above which leaves the building at ground level. An attractive feature of the room is a stone aumbry, or wall cupboard.



On the top floor there are two large rooms. Here all the windows are original except the highest one. Much of the roof timbering had to be replaced but an original truss and kingpost remains in one room. In the other a truss bears the date 1770, evidence of restoration at that time. To the right of the fireplace is a medieval piscina or washbasin which drained through the gargoyle seen outside. The arched doorway between the two rooms is original and on the right two drawings in the stonework can be seen.

### Uses of the Building

The second floor seems to have been used as high status prison accommodation at the time of Elizabeth I and two men; John Lowdham and Edmond Smith, both left messages on the walls. Look beside the wall light above the stair and you will see the first of many graffiti inscriptions on the building, left by both prisoners and users of the building.

Leading off from the stairway at second floor level is a narrow passage with five steps down which would have given access to the walls. Halfway along is one of the most unexpected features of the building, a delicately-carved statue niche that would have supported a statue of the Virgin Mary. Guests using the second floor in medieval times would have entered along this passage, no doubt bowing to St. Mary as they passed.

Opposite, to the right of the window, is the profile of an army officer from Napoleonic times with frilled shirt, epaulette and pigtail. To the left of the entrance doorway is the plaintive memorial: "S. Bennet confined June..1809".

The roof gives a commanding view of Leicester. There are inscriptions from the 1800s and 1940s, perhaps reflecting Home Guard activity. On the old roof lead, which was replaced in 1968, there were a number of outlines of square-toed military boots containing Union Jacks with appropriate dates and initials.

### The Gateway

In 1898 a new bridge was built across the river to deal with the increasing congestion of the West Bridge but until 1905 traffic still had to pass through the Gateway into the Newarke, Eventually, buildings just north of the gateway were demolished and a road was created alongside it, leaving the passage under the arch purely for pedestrian use.

Construction of the Newarke Underpass in 1967-8 involved the demolition of the houses in Magazine Square and the drill hall, leaving the Newarke Gateway on an island site. In 2007 the Newarke underpass was filled in, returning the Gateway to level access.

### The History of the Newarke Area

One of the first buildings in the Newarke area of Leicester was the Trinity Hospital founded by Henry, Earl of Lancaster in 1330.

In 1351 his son, Henry of Grosmont, became Duke of Lancaster and founded a lavish foundation including the hospital, a College and the Church of St. Mary of the Annunciation. He was given a holy relic, a thorn said to be from Christ's crown of thorns. It was placed on the high altar at St Mary's and at once attracted pilgrims to the College. The College was enclosed by walls running down to the River Soar and the Great Gateway was built c. 1400 as an impressive entrance.

The College was not only a religious and charitable foundation but also a burial place for the Lancastrian dynasty. The church of St Mary of the Annunciation was described by Leland (a contemporary observer) as "*not very great but it is exceeding fair*" and it probably introduced the perpendicular style of architecture to the Midlands.

The Duke of Lancaster steadily increased the College's endowments until it became very wealthy, owning land all over the country. In 1399 Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster became King Henry IV of England and the Newarke College became part of the royal estates.

In December 1440 a visitation in the chapter house of the College took place with Bishop Alnwick as judge. The Bishop received complaints and witness statements, indicating the College was not in good order. Complaints were made about a range of sins and crimes; bickering, bad language and brawling are recorded. It seems that the College was neither a quiet precinct or especially holy at times.

Bishop Alnwick banned the sale of food and drink in the precinct, including in the gatehouse. The Canon was removed from his post, unseemly people including women of late hours were banned from the precinct and many other rules were laid down by the Bishop, on pain of excommunication.

Eighty-five years later in 1525 things had changed very little. Bishop Longland, judge for the Visitation in 1525, gave his verdict on the evidence he had heard. The dean was instructed to manage the porter properly *"first by warning, secondly by withdrawal of his salary and thirdly by dismissal"*.

Henry VIII initiated enormous religious changes in the 1500s. The College and its chantries finally disappeared as an institution in 1548 under Edward VI when the Gatehouse was valued at 10 shillings a year. Many of the medieval college buildings, including the church, were demolished or adapted for new uses. People who lived in the Newarke were exempt from town taxes and it became a haven for Leicester's elite. Large gentry houses were built including Skeffington House which became Newarke Houses Museum.

### **Civil War**

The Newarke Gateway was used as a military building during the English Civil War. The nickname 'Magazine' began before 1642 when the county arms and armour were moved there from the Guildhall.

The use of the peaceful gatehouse for this military purpose made it a focus of contention during the Civil War period. Its possession in 1642 swayed between the Royalist Hastings family and the Parliamentary Greys and after the King's visit in July 1642 the contents were dispersed throughout the county. Some of the Parliamentarian Committee lived in the Newarke and the storage of weapons soon drifted back to the Gateway.

Royalist forces besieged Leicester at the end of May 1645 and Parliament was stung into action. Sir Thomas Fairfax joined Cromwell and marched to the Midlands. Just over the border in Northamptonshire on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1645 at the Battle of Naseby, the main army of King Charles I was destroyed by the New Model Army. The Parliamentarians then moved on to Leicester and artillery again opened fire on the Newarke walls on 16<sup>th</sup> June. Leicester was forced to surrender to the Parliamentarians and the Newarke Gateway was garrisoned once again.

### **Volunteer soldiers and the Royal Leicestershire Regiment**

In the 1800s the Gateway became the focus of a military complex. The militia was re-founded as a voluntary force in 1858 and a square of houses for military residents was built in 1863. In 1881 the Leicestershire volunteer forces became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment, a territorial force. By 1893 a drill hall was built across the northern side of Magazine Square which was the parade ground.



During World War I, the Magazine was used as a recruiting station and it was from here that men marched to the railway station and eventually to the Western Front in France and Belgium.

In 1969 the Museum of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment was opened in the Magazine, opening in 1968. In 1996 the museum closed, re-opening in 2007 in a new permanent home at Newarke Houses Museum.

### **For further information**

The Magazine is administered by Leicester Museums Service and is open free of charge to the public on the last Sunday of every month from 11:00am – 3:00pm. For more information visit [www.leicester.gov.uk/museums](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/museums).

Guided tours can be arranged for a small charge through Visit Leicester. For further information contact 0116 299 4444 or book online via [www.goleicestershire.com](http://www.goleicestershire.com)

**[www.storyofleicester.info](http://www.storyofleicester.info)**