

DISCOVERING BINGHAM

Quarterly NEWSLETTER of the **Bingham Heritage Trails Association**
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BHTA: Increasing public awareness of our heritage in Architecture, Folk & Natural History, Archaeology & Geology

WEEK 52

On 20th November we started Week 52 of the archaeological field-walking project. It came as something of a shock to realise that since December 2004 we have done a year's worth of field walking. Quite a lot of the team have been with it from the very beginning. It says a lot for their enthusiasm and hardiness that they are still prepared to put on their thermals and go out in mid winter to look for bits of broken pot in muddy fields. Only someone who has been up on the high ground south of the A52 on an icy cold, windy day and experienced the wind-chill will know what that means!

There are rewards, of course. A lucky band of seven field walkers out on Tuesday in Week 50 found themselves working very near to the Margidunum roundabout. They claim to have been shovelling up Roman pottery, human bones and teeth. None of the finds have been examined by the experts yet, but we know enough about Roman pottery now to feel sure we have got some great finds among this haul.

Before this we had another good Roman experience. Air photographs taken in times of drought often show crop marks that indicate something of archaeological importance that is never visible on the ground. In the 1970s a picture taken in



On 11th November, BHTA held the third Hot Pot supper. 70 people attended to enjoy the starters and main courses at eight hosted tables, with wine included, followed by a fantastic choice of desserts provided by other members and friends. The meal was followed by a light-hearted quiz compiled by John Perry. With a raffle and the auction of a donated copy of Miss Wertley's book, 'The History of Bingham', the evening raised over £650 toward the running costs of the Association. Everyone agreed that a great time was had by all and the event should become a permanent fixture in the social calendar.

the south of the parish showed a double ditched enclosure about 100 metres square. When we walked it this year we found over 60 fragments of Roman pottery and part of the neck of a Roman glass bottle. We are pretty sure that this is the site of a substantial Romano-British farmstead, adding to the three smaller establishments we think we identified in the first two years.

Compared with last year, when we were picking up flint flakes and tools almost everywhere, there have been fewer of them this season. Nonetheless, we did find a broken stone hand

axe. This is the second we have found; the first was picked up in Week 1 and may be a stone from Charnwood. The second seems to be from the Langdale 'axe factory'. This site, high up on Langdale Pike in the Lake District, produced hand axes that have been found all over Britain and Europe. They were made during the Neolithic period, the time when farming came to Britain. Nearly all the flints found in the first season have been identified as Neolithic or early Bronze Age. There seems to be a great concentration of them on the slopes near the River Smite and one of its small tributaries. We cannot come to any firm conclusions yet,



Reconstruction at Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire of an Iron Age roundhouse of the type that might have been dotted around our parish about 3000 years ago.

but the evidence is leading us to think that there may have been a Neolithic farming community living in this area. Just think, the land on Spring Farm and Starnhill has probably been farmed continuously for over 4000 years!

We have just about finished classifying the finds from the first year. This has taken so long because it has been hard to find experts with knowledge about the post-medieval pottery. All the sites of the first year's finds now have grid references so we are able, for the first time, to make meaningful maps showing where the different types of artifacts were found. When we have done a few of these, we are quite excited about making new discoveries about what went on in Bingham in times gone by.

The project is far from over. We still need volunteers to go field walking, to wash, bag and number finds and to work on the computer database. Even a couple of hours a week will be useful. Ring Peter Allen on 01949 831575 if you would like to help out.

HOUSE DETECTIVES

The theme of the BHTA 2007 calendar is 'Changing Bingham'. For many of the months it shows buildings that have either disappeared or have been altered, in some cases, almost beyond recognition! One example appears for May. We found a 1906 photograph of a thatched cottage that was claimed to be in Long Acre. The building appears to be front lit on an overcast day and from this we concluded that the cottage must have been on the north side of the road. Unfortunately there are no Bingham residents left whose memories go back to 1908. No one we showed the picture to could remember a thatched cottage in Long Acre but some suggested that it might be the 'Doubleday cottage', now the day nursery at No. 55 Long Acre, that has a tiled roof. We know that thatch was replaced by tiles at The Vaults, on the west corner of Market Street, and the Wheatsheaf, both in Long Acre. The 1906 photo below shows the roof extending beyond the far chimney stack which might indicate the first building had a central chimney, suggesting a date in the 1700s. At a later date, the cottage then might have been extended to the east with a second

chimney stack. Central chimneys were most often placed opposite the front door, which would then open onto a lobby giving access to the rooms right and left. If this cottage had a central chimney it would most likely be in line with the front door within the, originally, symmetrical window layout. Thus it seems more likely that the building started life as a thatched cottage with chimneys at both ends, built during the 1800s, with the roof beyond the far stack being added later. During the 1970s local people remembered this being demolished to give access to the rear of the site. Further investigation is needed to establish a more precise build date.

So when was the thatch replaced? Because no one can remember the building as it appeared in 1906, this probably happened around the 1920s. Unlike The Vaults, where the height of the eaves was increased to give the shallower slope for a tiled roof, in the case of No. 55, the ridge height has been lowered. However, looking at the building as it is today (see below) it is not easy to see how the two buildings relate as further extensions have been added to the east. The main extension was obviously built after the roof was tiled as the join can be clearly seen.



The conservatory was added in the 1990s. To see if these theories make sense, an overlay has been drawn on the 1906 photo'. This started with drawing line AB giving the present position of the western gable. From this it was possible to construct the line of the eaves and draw in the slope of the present roof to give the new ridge height. The position of the door and windows was then traced. By superimposing this overlay onto a recent photograph, adjusted slightly for the different camera angle, the window openings give a close match. Although the original front door has been filled in to form a small central window and one of the ground floor windows has been enlarged, we conclude that the 1906 cottage is definitely part of what is now the day nursery.

There is still a lot more work for the Building Detectives to do. For example, on the BHTA Calendar for November there is a picture of a gang of Walker's builders, can anyone identify the house they are building?

ROMAN BINGHAM

Our knowledge of Roman Bingham has changed a little since David Knight and Ruth Leary opened the BHTA winter lecture series with a talk about this in December 2002. As non-experts, when we pick out the finds that we think are Roman to send to Ruth for identification we are not sure how many she is going to return to us as not Roman. This year only a handful came back. That was quite satisfying because it means that we are getting better at recognising what is Roman



Typical Roman finds

and what is not. More importantly, though, it meant that of the 51 fields that we surveyed in the first two years, 34 of them had Roman pottery finds in them. Apparently, the Romans did not throw their broken pots into the midden for them to end up scattered over their fields when they were manured. Broken pots usually ended up either in a pile by the houses or were thrown into a convenient, nearby ditch. Thus, when we find a spread of broken Roman pottery it usually means that there was a house nearby. In a lot of the fields there was just a single piece, which is hard to interpret, but in some there were several, usually forming a cluster.

Field walking around Margidunum in both the first and second years has shown that there were houses along the Fosse Way for a few hundred metres south of the roundabout, where the defended part of the settlement is sited, and also well to the east of it. Add this to the findings made by Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit when they surveyed this area for the Highways Agency and you get a picture of a sprawling, unplanned small town with ribbon

development along the roads in and out of the centre and covering an area as big as 19th century Bingham. We can only guess at the population, but it could have been over a thousand. Small Roman towns like this in other parts of Britain are thought to have been self-sufficient in food, which was provided by small farmsteads in the surrounding countryside.

Among the sherds of Roman pottery we have picked up there have been some from coarse, handmade pottery that would have been made and used by the indigenous British. The picture that is emerging, then, is that in the countryside around Margidunum there were several small farmsteads where British farmers cultivated the land to provide food to sell in the market there. At first, they probably lived in traditional round houses made of timber, mud and thatch, but after time the people became Romanised, built rectangular houses and started using Roman pottery. In fact, in one of the fields we found something that Ruth thought might have been a hypocaust tile among the sherds of pottery. (2000 year old under-floor heating!-Ed.)

On the evidence of the first two seasons of fieldwork we can identify at least three possible sites for small farmsteads. We hope that by the end of the project we will be able to locate more and produce a speculative map showing the full extent of Margidunum town and the locations of the villa, cemeteries, small farmsteads and cottages that made up Roman Bingham.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bingham on the World Map !

At Antwerp in Belgium is a World Heritage Museum housed in the former premises of one of the earliest printing and publishing houses of Europe, founded in c.1550 by Christopher Plantin and in continuous operation by his descendants on the same site until c. 1860.

One of the books printed there - a copy of which is now on display - was the second earliest world atlas ever published. It was compiled by Gerard de Jode in the 1560s although not published until 1578. Britain is depicted on a double page spread, oriented east-west, with place names printed in tiny script. However places such as Nottingham, Newark, Melton, and even 'Bynham' are included! As this atlas would have been

sold worldwide, the existence of Bingham would have become available to the educated classes throughout the known world for the first time in history.

BHTA Gets Nominated, Again

For the second year running BHTA were been nominated in the Rushcliffe Community Awards Scheme in the Building Strong Community section. Peter Allen and Geoff Ashton attended the Awards Ceremony on 26th October. We didn't win but they came away with a certificate. It is gratifying to know that our work is appreciated.

Reprint Available

Due to the very generous underwriting of the cost by Graham Hunter of 3DLM, a reprint of **Victorian Bingham**, which has been out of print for many years, is now available. If you would like to get a copy, please contact the Bingham

& District Local History Society on Bingham 837510 to order. The price is £5 plus £1 p&p within the UK. The book will also be available at the library, the News Bar and the Town Council offices.

Rushcliffe Heritage Buildings Survey.

BHTA recently attended the first meeting of a group sponsored by Rushcliffe Borough Council formally to identify and register buildings of local historical interest. This will be a very long term project for volunteers with an interest in old buildings and their preservation.

Geoff Ashton has the details.

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**DON'T FORGET YOUR
BHTA 2007
Calendar
£3.00**

On sale from the
New agents in Eaton Place
& Geoff Ashton, 19 Church St.

2007 SEASON BHTA FREE PUBLIC LECTURES

Sponsored by NCC
Rushcliffe Members Forum

Lectures will all be held on
Thursday evenings at 7.30pm.
in the Methodist Church Hall.

11th January
Peter Hammond
**Clay Tobacco
Pipes**

8th March
Adrian Henstock
Coaching & Turnpikes

10th May
Joyce Allen
What the Papers Say