

# DISCOVERING BINGHAM

Quarterly NEWSLETTER of the **Bingham Heritage Trails Association**  
[www.binghamheritage.org.uk](http://www.binghamheritage.org.uk) Registered Charity No: 1090475 Issue No. 12 - June 2006

BHTA: Increasing public awareness of our heritage in Architecture, Folk & Natural History, Archaeology & Geology

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Issue No. 12 of the BHTA quarterly newsletter marks the completion of our third year of publication. To celebrate this auspicious occasion we have added a spot of colour and, within the limits of our budget, have taken steps to improve the quality of the black and white pictures. However, it is the content that is important, we hope you will find this both informative and entertaining.

We are also increasing our circulation. Over the last two years we have welcomed many new members to the Association and an increasing proportion of these live outside Bingham. With this in mind, we will now be distributing free copies to the libraries in Cotgrave, Radcliffe, West Bridgford, Keyworth, Bottesford and Newark as well as the Nottinghamshire mobile library serving the neighbouring villages. The Binghamites will, of course, still be able to pick up their copy from the town library and the Old Court House in Church Street. We extend a warm welcome to any new readers. If they, or our regular readers wish to contact us, the information you need is on the back page.

**Now read on!**

## CHURCHYARD MAPPING PROJECT COMPLETED



The last in this year's series of open lectures marked the completion of the mapping of the Parish Churchyard when Geoff Ashton, the Project Leader, described the work of his team.

(A report of his presentation appears on page 3.) The picture shows him (third from left) with some of the team members holding bound copies of the results of their labours. Sets of these have been presented to the Church, Library and Town Council.

## END OF SEASON

The last twelve months have seen diverse initiatives led by BHTA. A huge amount of effort has gone into the churchyard project, funded by **Awards For All**, and the archaeological field-walking survey, funded by the **Local Heritage Initiative**. The oral history interviews have continued, (see page 2) we have designed a new information board for the corner of Market Place, answered enquiries about Bingham from all over the world, put on the winter lecture series sponsored by **NCC Rushcliffe Members'**

**Forum**, maintained the newsletter and, of course, we have organised our usual fund-raising events. The churchyard project was done in collaboration with various interest groups of Bingham U3A, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust and members of the church, while the field walking has attracted volunteers from far and wide and could not have been done without the help and co-operation of Bingham's farmers. We give our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped us in any way.

As you will see from the above picture and the later report, the churchyard project is now

over. What is so satisfying about this is that for Geoff Ashton, who has been putting in fifteen-hour days, it brings together five years of research on Bingham's old families started while delving into the deeds for old houses in 2001.



*Local Farmer Chris Cockayne discussing some of the finds with Peter Allen at a recent field walkers' 'Get-Together' evening.*

The archaeological field-walking project is now half way through. We realised during the summer that we were not going to complete it in three years, largely because the pattern of crop rotation used on Bingham's farms meant that there would only be a finite number of fields available to us each year. We asked the Local Heritage Initiative for an extension of one year and got it. The project now ends in October 2008.

The achievements so far are impressive. Since December 2004 we have done 43 weeks of fieldwork, surveyed over 2 square miles of the parish and collected, washed and bagged over 30,000 finds. Most of the results of the expert examination of last year's finds are now in and we are already able to see interesting patterns even from the patchwork of

fields we did in the first season. The work on processing this season's finds is well underway, but even before the experts see them we know that we have some good finds. They range from little beauties like the Bronze Age flint arrow head found on Spring Farm, thumb-nail size flint scrapers to an almost complete 17<sup>th</sup> century clay pipe bowl and stem. However, the distribution of the individual finds is as interesting. It is not quite archaeological, but for us it is useful and amusing to discover from the spread of fragments of NAAFI tableware just where the contents of the Newton Airfield cesspits went!

## **BACK TO THE FUTURE**

The BHTA has become well known for raking around in the past and archiving the findings on its web site and in various free publications. Their interest starts with pre-history Bingham and moves on through the centuries, although it tends to run out of steam after WW2. There is, however, one important exception – the Oral History project.

This was the topic covered in the second of this year's series of open public lectures held at the Methodist church hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> March when Hilda Smith spoke on



'Bingham Yesterday and Today'.

For the last two years, she and her team of interviewers have been recording conversations with people who live or work in the town. Some of the older residents have memories going back to the 1920s, which are fascinating, but equally important to the project are the stories of the younger interviewees who are contributing to the community at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Think how exciting it would be if we came across old wax cylinder recordings of, say, the Rector Robert Miles or the headmaster of the first Board School, speaking about their life and work in the 1870s! The Oral History Project is making such an experience possible for our successors in 50 or 100 years time. Over 30 recorded interviews, with typed transcripts, have already been lodged with the County and Bingham libraries, and the work is continuing.

Hilda played a brief selection of extracts from the recorded interviews to a large and attentive audience and illustrated her talk with synchronised slides. We heard how the local veterinary service has changed in recent times from serving the local farmers to an exclusively domestic pet practice and of the duties of Dr. Croft's housekeeper. There was the chance to compare the memories of someone who worked for the Bingham Rural District Council in the 1950s with the work of today's Town Clerk. Then accounts from the managers of the Handicentre and the Funeral Directors made the point that, even today, we know very little about the various jobs that people carry out in the

community. When these, and many more interviews that will be added to the archive, are studied in the year 2100 and beyond, our successors will learn of individuals and a way of life that might otherwise have been lost.

In his vote of thanks to the speaker, Peter Allen, BHTA Chairman, reminded the audience that Hilda's task in gathering the oral history was an ongoing project and anyone with suggestions for possible interviewees, should contact her. Natural modesty usually prevents individuals from volunteering themselves, so the suggestions need to come from friends and family. Peter also mentioned that the Association is always interested to receive, on loan, any pictorial or documentary evidence of Bingham's past for general research into the heritage of the town.

## **BENEATH THAT YEW TREE'S SHADE...**

The final lecture of this year's series was given by Geoff Ashton, BHTA vice chairman and leader of the BHTA/U3A project to map the parish churchyard. After revealing *Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard* as the inspiration for his title, he told his audience that he had become intrigued by the diminutive gravestone to the memory of six month old Dora Doubleday that had become another inspiration for undertaking the project!

The questions everyone who saw the work in progress during last summer asked were 'What are you doing?' closely followed by 'Why?!' Geoff gave four reasons:

- To link with previous work of BHTA
- To help the Rector deal with enquiries from researchers of Family History as to the location of individual stones
- To provide a source of information for people in Bingham with ancestors buried in the churchyard and for other students – e.g. Victorian studies in schools
- Produce a trail leaflet with some interesting facts about the churchyard.

The results of the project, which were on display and about which Geoff talked, were the leaflet, maps of the churchyard together with a handbook describing each stone with its location reference and biographical details for those recorded on the stones. The project also recorded the flora and fauna, including lichens, of the churchyard. Unexpected outputs had been an analysis of inscriptions and genealogical charts for many Bingham families. These two reports are now available for reference in the library. All the material is available on our web site.

The oldest stone in the churchyard dates from 1681, although it is unreadable! The oldest with a name you can read is dated 1699, for Mary Hean. Geoff ranged over many areas of interest arising from the work, including the geology of the stones, the masons who made them (with special reference to Thomas Wood and Stephen Squires who were jointly responsible for half of them!). He compared ages at death with today's statistics, highlighting not only the incidence of infant mortality in those days but

also showing how all age ranges were equally represented in the statistics, whereas today the majority die after age 60.

Bingham has three Belvoir Angel stones, the earliest examples of decorated headstones. Examples of mistakes by the masons provoked some amusement in the audience – did the Kelhams have '8' children, as carved, or 'six' as written over in white paint afterwards? Was Mrs Oliver called Ann (actually her daughter's name) or Sarah? The mistake resulted in an almost unreadable name with two initial capitals!

There was a tendency for some families just to record the number of children buried with their parents rather than naming them, but there were also some poignant pictures and descriptions of individual children's gravestones and inscriptions. All of Bingham's well known family names are represented in the churchyard, of course: Thomas Hart and John Strong are just two examples of the family histories buried there. Two members of the churchyard team had researched the background of Gunner Pike, remembered on two half hidden, broken pieces of kerb stone from his grandfather's (now missing) memorial. They had discovered he had been a solicitor's clerk, was from Radcliffe and is remembered on the First World War memorial there and has a plaque in Radcliffe church.

Geoff concluded by presenting some of the epitaphs found on the stones. An analysis of these suggests changing fashions in the content of epitaphs and in particular the significant change around 1850 from

using verses to single line biblical quotations.

The evening concluded with a presentation of the materials resulting from the project to Eric Sharpe for the Town Council and to Hilary Strasburger, for the library. The evening having clashed with Ascension Day the Rector was otherwise engaged but a full set of the maps and handbooks will also be lodged with him.



*Chief Librarian Hilary Strasburger receives copies of the project data.*

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Who uses the BHTA website?

When we set up the website in 2001 we had no idea how to judge its success. **Ambrow**, who look after our website, monitor its use. The most meaningful way of doing this is to count the number of *visits* to the site per day. For a long time this number was in single figures. Then, after the first upgrade in 2004, we started to see a steady growth in usage and in the last six months there have been on average 85 visits a day. In March it reached the dizzy heights of 120.

We have no idea who these people are, but a breakdown of the figures give some clues. The lowest usage is during the months of July, August and December. The highest use is on weekdays and though there is a

steady, low level of use through the night it shoots up at 9 am and remains high through to midnight. From this it would seem that some of our users are British school children, probably doing project work. We know from the entry pages that they come to us with a wide range of interests from butterflies to the Second World War to Roman pottery. It used to be possible to tell whether the users came from UK or abroad, but not now. However, we regularly get e-mails through the website from overseas, which explains the steady low-level usage through the night.

### End of Season Celebration

All Members of the Association are invited to an End of Season Celebration with wine and nibbles at 7.30 pm. at The Old Court House, Church Street, Bingham, on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June.

The evening will include a short Annual General Meeting, an illustrated presentation of the Association's activities over the past year with details of archaeological finds and the survey of the Churchyard. We look forward to seeing you on the night - RSVP to Joyce Allen.

## HOW TO CONTACT OUR OFFICERS

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BROUGH Sue	COMMITTEE	11 Hazel Close 838672
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SNOWDIN Roger	TREASURER	26 Gillotts Close. 839148
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### Hot Pot Supper and Quiz

Plans are afoot to repeat this popular event in November. For a change we hope to incorporate a quiz. Further details will be given in the next newsletter.

**An evening not to be missed!**

**Don't forget  
your copy of the  
latest BHTA leaflet**

**BINGHAM'S**  
*Churchyard*  
**TRAIL**

**FREE** from the Library  
and Town Office