

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

TEST PITS

As the name implies the archaeological pits being dug in Bingham are exploratory and though we have some objectives in mind before we dig, they are done mainly to find out what is there. Considering the element of serendipity in the selection of the sites and their small size some remarkable things have been revealed - ancient rubbish pits, animal graves, post-holes, old floors and walls of long-gone buildings and garden features.

From the 34 pits we have dug to date there are many highlights. The diggers enjoyed working on the three schools projects and it is clear to see why the Heritage Lottery Fund require an educational input when making the grant. Now,



The Bingham Belles, a section of the Women's Institute, is the latest local organisation to ask BHTA to take them on the Town Heritage Walk. Here are some of their 30 members in Long Acre hearing from Sue Hodson how the Horse and Plough was built in 1818 as a Methodist 'Ranters' Chapel.

weeks later, we still meet children who come up to us to talk about the dig in their school. At Robert Miles Junior School we were blessed with some of the best weather of the summer and very

interesting discoveries. In one pit we discovered what appears to be a garden feature from the 18th C Rectory. In another we found a post-hole with slivers of oak in it at the corner of a cobbled floor belonging to a building that predated the 18th C Rectory, which is the earliest recorded building on this site. We also found Elizabethan bricks and several pieces of stone roofing slate of a kind used on medieval buildings and recorded only once before in Nottinghamshire.

Perhaps the most interesting information we have gathered is about the origins of Bingham. The only professional archaeological investigations to have taken place in central Bingham were on a site behind the Chesterfield Arms. A Roman



Diggers and sievers at work at one of the pit locations

cemetery was found and evidence of fields used for arable farming and stock rearing in the late Iron Age and Roman times. There were no indications of housing. Now, in a nearby garden we have found a post-hole for a timber structure that may have been a house. It was filled with soil containing early Roman pottery and is probably from a building that dates from the 1st century AD. Several other gardens in central Bingham have yielded Roman pottery, showing that the area where Romans lived and worked in central Bingham was fairly large. In many of these gardens we have found pottery from the Anglo-Saxon period that follows the Roman occupation and from the later Norman Conquest. When we started this project we thought that Bingham village was probably built by the Anglo-Saxons, but now it appears to be much, much older.

One of the most surprising aspects of this project has been the high quality of the finds. We were used to finding eroded and worn pottery when field walking. Now, though, the fragments (as below)



Part of the rim of a 230mm (9") diameter medieval cooking pot. Black staining on the rim and parts of the body show where the pot burned while in use.

which have not been touched for several centuries, are pristine when we find them. Being the first person to touch them since the broken pots were thrown out is an eerie feeling. They are so well preserved that we are able to appreciate the true beauty of their original colours.

There are a possible 29 more pits that we can dig, so we might be able to do another 14 before the weather and failing light stops us for the year. This will leave about 15 to finish off next year.

HOUSE HISTORIES

The second strand of the current **Roots and Development of Bingham** project is concerned with discovering the origins of a number of buildings in the town centre area. This work is being done by Trent and Peak Archaeology and Nottingham Tree Ring Dating Laboratory and accounts for a large slice of our budget. There are two aspects. T&P survey a building and produce a plan, establish the various phases of building and assess likely dates of construction from the architectural evidence and an assessment of fittings such as doors, windows and fireplaces. Tree-ring dating relies on obtaining the growth pattern of trees from core samples from timbers in the building by measuring the width of the annual growth-rings. This is done to a tolerance of 1/100 of a millimetre. The growth patterns of these samples are then compared with a series of reference patterns or chronologies, the date of each ring of which is known. This will establish the date of

felling of the timber. If a statistically significant number of samples produces a tight range of dates this usually indicates the trees were felled to build the building under investigation and hence gives a reasonably accurate date for building.

Almost all the field work has now been done for the project. Seven buildings have been subject to tree ring dating and full survey. We have undertaken only the tree ring dating exercise on another two or three. Some target buildings have proved not to have beams suitable for dendrochronology - softwood and elm cannot be dated. We still hope that it will be possible to add the Manor House in the Market Place to the list of building to be surveyed.

So far we have received one interim report, on the Old Post Office House. This suggests the main part of the house was built in about 1689. There is a recycled beam dating from 1313, but one can only speculate where this might have come from! Reports on the other buildings will become available over the next few months.

STOP PRESS

Readers will be aware that the Manor House has been boarded up for about 15 years now and is in danger of becoming derelict. It is certainly in need of some TLC! As BHTA is primarily a research project based group rather than a campaigning organisation, Geoff Ashton is trying to do something about the fate of this building independently of the

Association. Before anyone can even think about how to acquire the building or apply for funds to restore it, there needs to be a viable, sustainable and acceptable business plan for its after use. He has already held one public meeting inviting concerned residents to suggest possible uses and to discuss a way forward.



If any reader cares about the Manor House it is not too late to contact Geoff. (See page 4)

NOW YOU SEE IT...



NOW YOU DON'T!



On Sunday 29th July a False Acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) tree, about 90 years old, growing outside the Frank Innes estate agents on the corner of Market Place and Church Street was felled. This was one of only two of this species growing in public places in Bingham. Neither the Bingham Town Council nor the tree officer of Rushcliffe Borough Council knew about it beforehand. When the clerk of the council enquired about it she was told by the Forestry Inspector in the Highways Agency that the tree "...had several fungal fruiting decay brackets at the

base that would eventually cause structural failure. This situation was monitored for the last 2 years and the decision was taken to remove it, as the decayed region was increasing in size." While no one denies that the public should be protected from potentially dangerous trees, this one was in a conservation area and is quite rare in the parish. Bingham Town Council and the RBC tree officer should have been informed and have been part of the decision about the fate of this tree.

NOTTINGHAM JOURNAL COURT REPORTS FOR 1833 POLICE INTELLIGENCE - JUSTICE ROOM*, BINGHAM.

July 26th 1833

July 18th (before the Rev Robert Lowe and William Taylor, Esq.) - Several trades people and beer sellers, residing in the neighbourhood of Bingham, were convicted in mitigated penalties and costs, for using short weights and measures.

Mary Riddall was committed to the House of Correction at Southwell for twelve calendar months, for having a bastard child chargeable to the parish of Bingham.

On Tuesday last, William Farrler was convicted by the Rev Robert Lowe as an idle and disorderly person, for begging in the parish of Bingham, and was committed to the said House of Correction, to be held to hard labour for one calendar month.

August 16th 1833 CHAIN GANG!

In the night of Tuesday the 5th instant, some thieves contrived to extract the chain (which is thirty-two yards long, and

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weighs upward of one hundred weight) from the well upon the premises belonging to Mr Stephen Horsepool, farmer, situate by the side of the old Foss, in the parish of Bingham, with which they made off, and have not been heard of since.



*House of Correction,
Southwell*

August 30th 1833

August 15th (before the Rev John Storer and W.F.N. Norton, Esq.) John Jebb, of Bingham, was convicted of being a rogue and a vagabond, for running away, and leaving his wife and children chargeable to that parish, and was committed to the House of Correction at Southwell, to be held to hard labour for three calendar months.

William Connor was convicted of being an idle and disorderly person for begging at Bingham, and was committed to the same House of Correction to be held to hard labour for fourteen days.

*** So where was the Justice Room, Bingham?**

It is probable that in 1833 the 'justice room' would have simply been a function room in the Chesterfield, which was

fairly standard practice in most towns until court houses were built in the 1850s.

However, White's 1844 Directory states that 'A Temperance Hall was built in 1843. Petty sessions are held here every alternate Thursday'. Presumably the temperance movement objected to justice being meted out in a pub and offered their premises instead !?

THE JUBILEE TREE

In the June issue we announced the start of our search for a tree to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. In spite of our relatively limited knowledge of arboriculture we were confident that with some research and the help of experts we would eventually find the perfect specimen. As the tree is to be planted in the cemetery off The Banks, where BHTA has named existing trees to form an arboretum, the first task was not to find the tree itself, but the location and with the help of the Town Council's groundsman, Neil, three sites were earmarked. Each would be suitable for different trees. One was perfect for a small tree and would be seen by passers-by on the Banks, the others were higher up the cemetery, and would be suitable for taller trees.

So, which one to go for? Best to look at trees and having made a choice, the site would

choose itself. This proved easier said than done; talking to nursery staff, who were helpful in the extreme, showing us tree after tree, each more lovely or more unusual than the last, most seemed to be just what we were looking for, so long as they would survive in the chosen environment. So armed with a long, long list, we turned to books on trees and went online to do some research. The long, long list soon became a long list. That beautiful tall tree, for example, had a nasty habit of shedding branches at the hint of a high wind; health and safety issues here! Then there was the Katsura tree with stunning spring, summer and



Katsura

autumn foliage but we learned it did not like north facing slopes, late frosts and in its early years would prefer its trunk wrapped up against the cold. Definitely unsuitable. It seemed that most of the trees needed specialist attention or setting, whereas we needed a species that is hardy, low maintenance and, preferably, one that is not already growing in the arboretum that would enhance the environment and give pleasure to those visiting the cemetery. The list is much shorter now and hopefully the final decision will soon be made. One of our local nurseries has promised to find any tree we choose, in time for an autumn planting.

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