

DISCOVERING BINGHAM

Quarterly NEWSLETTER of the **Bingham Heritage Trails Association**

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

www.binghamheritage.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 109475

Issue No.68 April 2023

Welcome to the latest newsletter of Bingham heritage Trails Association.

Our next event is the lecture about James Prior Kirk, which will be on May 11th in the Bingham Methodist Centre at 8pm. Admission is free, and all are welcome, especially new members.

Women's Land Army in Bingham in World War 2

In the two world wars of the 20th Century, women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers as men were called up for the armed forces.

Women joined the armed forces and many of the auxiliary services. One of these was the Women's Land Army, where women took up agricultural work to replace men who had joined up and to ensure the increase in food production the country required.

Before war started in September 1939, Britain imported twenty million imperial tons of food annually. 70% or more of all food stuffs and animal feed were imported. With disruption to trade routes, German U Boats and land occupations, the government realised it would need to feed people with less and some food stuffs would be scarce because they could not be grown in Britain. Rationing halved dependence on food imports during the war and in 1942-1943 food subsidies of £145 million were authorised. 10,000 more square miles of land was brought into agricultural production.



Feeding calves

In Nottingham, in 1941, Joan Bottomore, aged 18, went with her sister and a friend to sign up at the Royal Navy recruiting office in Nottingham. It was closed, but the nearby Women's Land Army office was open. Joan and her sister, Betty, both joined the WLA straightaway. Joan says that they wanted to 'do their bit' but were also 'ripe for adventure' and keen to strike out on their own away from parental control.

This edition has been kindly printed by Bingham's Community Estate Agent who have pledged to donate £100 to B.H.T.A. for anyone who uses their services and have a genuine link to the B.H.T.A.



Hammond
Property Services

Joan describes the farm she was sent to as 'the last place God made and even He didn't stay to finish it.' She shared a small farm cottage. The cost of rent and food took up most of her pay and the farm was too remote for any social life.

The women carried out all types of farmwork all year and other work in winter. One winter they laid railway tracks in Ruddington.



Joan & Betty

Joan was in demand on the farm because she could milk cows and few other women could. She and another woman ran a pig farm in Gamston while the farmer was in hospital. They helped vets with artificial insemination and TB testing of cows.

Working days seemed endless when working on the harvest.



Women of WLA Hostel with Matron

A WLA Hostel was built on Tithby Rd in Bingham. It was run by the YWCA and County War Agricultural Committee. There were dormitories, baths, showers, washing and drying facilities and a recreation room. Joan applied to WLA headquarters to be transferred to the hostel and was given permission to move in. At night the women sang round the piano, danced to records, (which they clubbed together to buy) and played on a wind-up gramophone.

Some nights there were Whist Drives with the villagers where they raised money for charities connected with the war effort.

Work was hard, encompassing every agricultural task and many others. Joan says 'our backs arms, feet and hearts ached, but we sang and danced.'

There were huge celebrations when the war ended, then it was back to work. Joan was invalided out after the war with exhaustion. She was sent to a rehabilitation centre in Torquay. When she came back to Nottingham, she found it hard to settle back into city life.

(Thanks to Joan's daughter, Cynthia Parrington, for talking to me and lending me her mother's archive.)

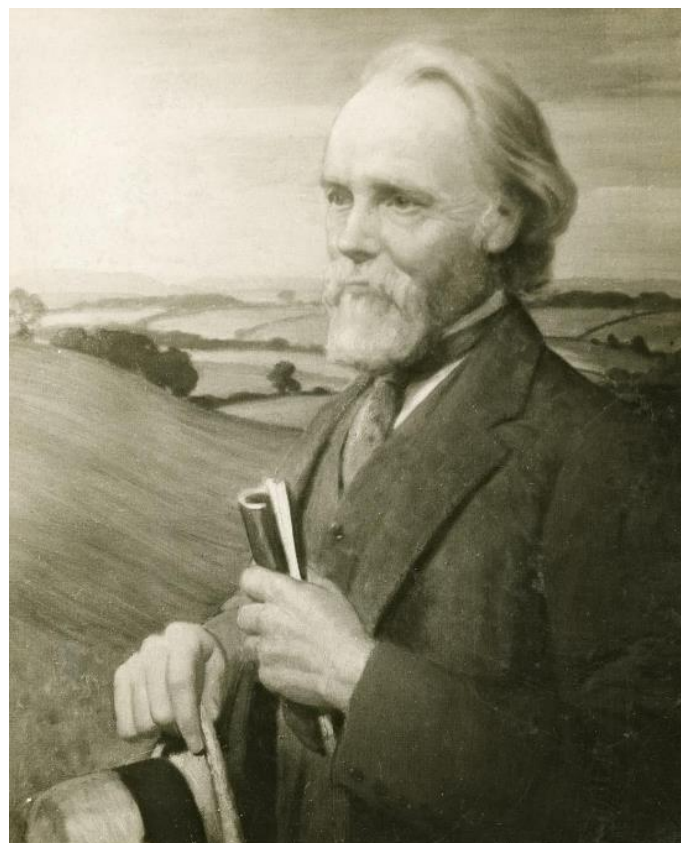
Clare Wilkins

Rediscovering a forgotten Bingham author

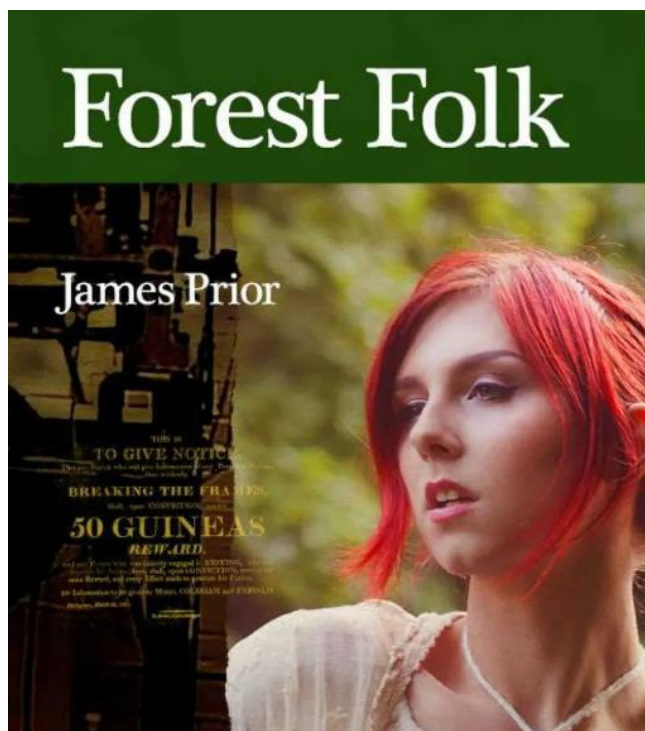
– a forthcoming event

In November of last year Bingham Heritage Trails Association installed Bingham's first commemorative Blue Plaques to coincide with the centenary of the death of a once-celebrated resident, **James Prior Kirk**, who wrote under the name of **James Prior**. Interested readers can find the plaques on the walls of 19 Fisher Lane and 22 The Banks, and can also visit his grave in Bingham Town Cemetery.

James Prior was born in Nottingham but adopted Bingham as his home from 1891 until his death in 1922. He is one of many Nottinghamshire writers whose names have faded from view over the last hundred years. Recently, interest in these 'forgotten authors' has increased and now Prior is emerging from the shadows as one of the most remarkable literary figures the county has produced.



At first, he lived in Brusty Cottage (now Lushai Cottage) on Fisher Lane. Then, with his family growing, he moved round the corner to the newly built Banks Cottage. Bingham suited Prior well and he wrote six major novels during his years here, the most famous of which, *Forest Folk*, was recently re-published by Spokesman Books.



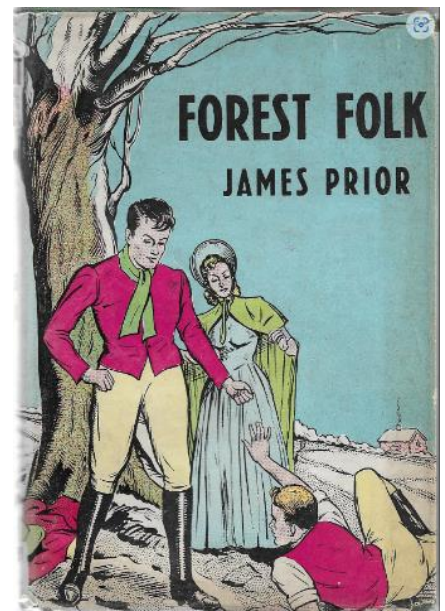
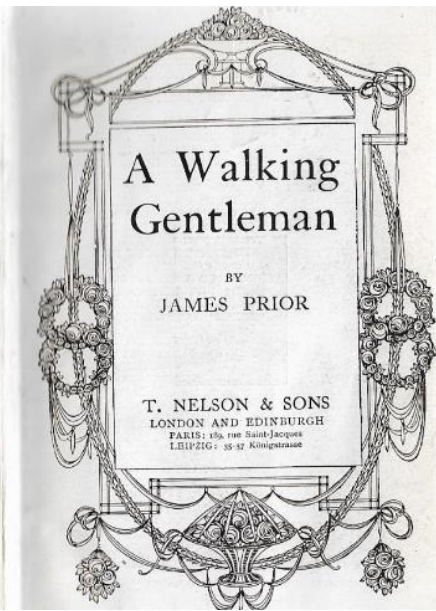
Prior loved the countryside around Bingham, often weaving local landscapes, incidents, and characters into his novels. In spite of suffering serious problems with his eyesight, he was a great walker and would set out early in the morning with his notebook, to explore, jot down ideas for characters, record impressions and capture the voices of the local people.

In his own day, Prior was compared to Thomas Hardy, Dickens, George Eliot, and Sir Walter Scott. But one thing makes him stand out from other writers. Throughout his life Prior was interested in the authentic voices of the people of the East Midlands. He listened, collected, and celebrated the words and phrases that gave **Nottinghamshire dialect** its distinctive energy and colour.

In this respect, he paved the way for the use of dialect in DH Lawrence's early works.



She spoke to him through the window as he sat smoking a cigar.



To further recognise and celebrate Prior's heritage and contribution, BHTA is devoting the first of its 2023 annual free public lectures to a talk and round-table discussion involving several key experts on Prior.

John Baird, author of *Follow the Moon and Stars: a literary journey through Nottinghamshire*, Five Leaves Publications, 2021

Professor Natalie Braber, Professor of Linguistics at Nottingham Trent University and an expert on accents and dialects, including 'Pit Talk': the language of miners in the East Midlands.

Ailish D'Arcy, author of *In Search of James Prior*, Spokesman Books, 2022

Tony Simpson, Spokesman Books

The lecture, entitled **Rediscovering James Prior**, will take place on Thursday May 11th at Bingham Methodist Centre, commencing at 8 pm. Admission is free and all are welcome.

Bingham Heritage & Trails Association AGM will be held in the W I Hut on Station Street, Bingham on 23rd June 2023 starting at 19.30

BHTA will be at the Bingham Summer Fair on 10th June. We need Members of the BHTA to help with the stall.

If you can help, then please contact the Secretary on 01949 876 570 or email nrthomas@ntlworld.com

We can be contacted via our website at:

bhta@binghamheritage.org.uk