

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

PITS PROGRESS

On 22nd July BHTA began the second season of archaeological digs in the centre of Bingham and by the 14th May had dug six, bringing the total of completed pits to 51. Our undertaking to the Heritage Lottery Fund was for between 30 and 50. We have around a dozen still to do and should be finished by July. We then have until January 2015 to complete our study and publish the findings.

The six pits dug this year have been diverse, to say the least. Two of them ended up in historic rubbish dumps. It still amazes me how we can site a pit almost randomly in a garden and find a posthole, or a wall or a rubbish dump. One of the rubbish dumps contained a rusting bicycle, various kinds of industrial chain, a cast iron fire grate, paint tins, shoes and much else. It was most likely to be a twentieth-century dump behind Chancel Row, the tenements that were on the site of the Ennis Building until demolition in the late 1950s. We found some horseshoes among the rubbish and as we know one of the occupants of the housing was a carrier, were these something he failed to sell on?

The second rubbish dump contained several whole medicine bottles, one with the embossed name *Chemist, Seaton's of Bingham*. Mr

DIAMOND JUBILEE TREE IN SPRINGTIME



The Amelanchier grandiflora 'Ballerina' tree that BHTA donated to the cemetery arboretum on The Banks seems to have settled down in its new home. In spite of a pretty dreadful winter, its spring blossom arrived on cue and now we can look forward to orange and red leaves with purple berries in the autumn. As the tree becomes established we can expect increasingly spectacular displays over the years to come.

Seaton had a chemist's shop here between 1926 and 1953, which dates this pit. His shop was the building opposite the end of Union Street now used by Mr Mees to store kitchen white goods. For the older readers, the medicine bottles were graduated in tablespoons and teaspoons. No millilitres in those days!

In one other pit we encountered almost the perfect section, until we got to the bottom. In the perfect section the youngest pots are at the top and they gradually become older with depth. It is not as common to find this as

one might expect because mixing of pottery of different ages can occur for several reasons. Bits of pot can go down in animal burrows; they can rise through the soil during digging, ploughing and because of the weather. We seemed to have found a piece of ground that has been undisturbed like this since the 13th century. Then, below a layer of 13-14th century Nottingham Green Glaze pot fragments at 80 cm depth we found 20 cm with Roman, Anglo-Saxon, medieval and 15th century pottery in it. There was a sharp boundary at about 80 cm depth making it

look as if we had found a medieval land surface. The older pottery had been scattered about on it just as we find pottery of all ages in the fields during field walking. The 15th century piece is the problem, but it might have got there in an animal burrow.

One intriguing pit revealed a part of a stone wall. Red clay had been used as mortar between the stones and as a foundation layer beneath the wall. We could date the wall as medieval from pottery underneath stones that had fallen off it. This is the fourth pit in which we have found red clay used like this. What is interesting is that in two of the pits the feature was medieval; in the third it was 18th /19th century and in the fourth it was 20th century. We seem to have found a practice used by local builders for at least 800 years.

COMMUNITY DIG

As part of the Council for British Archaeology's Festival fortnight, 2013, BHTA will be doing an archaeological dig in Robert Miles Junior School from **22nd to 26th July**. Members of the public are invited along to experience the dig and there will be someone there to explain it to them. During the school project carried out there in 2012 we discovered a stone floor and posthole for a building that existed on the site some time before 1715. This is the place where the rectory stood for 200 years before it was demolished in the 1960s. We know little about the history of the site before then. Our aim is to try to find the size, extent, function and likely age of the building. We will do a geophysical survey before hand to help us on the way. We will be able to allow a small number of children to take

part in this project, **but they will have to have a responsible adult with them at all times**. If you want to experience this archaeological dig then come along.

ROMAN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

On 28th March Mark Patterson gave the second of the season's free talks to an audience of over 70 in the Methodist Hall. The talk, advertised as *Roman Nottinghamshire*, focused on Margidunum and events in the south of the county. Mark has recently published a book - *Roman Nottinghamshire*. He is not an archaeologist, but he is widely read and has studied all the available information about Margidunum in some depth. He was therefore able to give a thoroughly objective account, not having any personal research to defend.

Mark gave a step-by-step account of the history of the town from before the Romans arrived, weighing up the evidence provided by the three periods of excavation. The first carried out over several decades in the early part of the twentieth century was by Felix Oswald. Malcolm Todd excavated there in the 1960s prior to building the new roundabout and road scheme. Latterly, after the area was covered by field walking conducted by Trent & Peak Archaeology through the 1990s, it was partly excavated by Cotswold-Wessex prior to the building of the new A46 in 2009-2012. Mark showed that Oswald was strongly influenced by preconceived notions of Britain during the time of the Roman Conquest and tended to shape the

interpretation of his observations to fit this model. When looked at critically few could be substantiated and some appeared even fanciful. He placed much greater store by the analyses done by Malcolm Todd and the latest research yet to be fully published by Cotswold-Wessex, but freely admitted that there were many questions left unanswered.

He ended his talk with a discussion about the discovery of several neonatal skeletons buried around a building sited on the Fosse and excavated by Cotswold-Wessex. There were many possible explanations for them, including that the building was a brothel and that the skeletons were babies disposed of by prostitutes. This lead on to matters of morality and ethics in the period compared with modern times and was followed by a lively discussion from the floor after the talk.

HOUSE HISTORIES

For the third and last in our series of free open lectures Geoff Ashton spoke on the investigation into the history of some of the older buildings in the town. This is the other part of the current lottery funded BHTA project which also includes digging pits at over 50 sites scattered over the town. Geoff explained that this part of our *Roots of Bingham* project involved dendrochronology as well as detailed archaeological and architectural surveys. These are being done with the help of two experts, Robert Howard and Richard Shepherd. For dendro, at least fifty annual growth rings are needed to establish an acceptably



From left to right: The old Post Office and The Vaults Hotel on Long Acre, photo c.1970, filled 'bull's eye' window marked '<'. The 'Manor House' and cottages and Beauvale House, possibly the site of the real 12th century Manor House, both in the Market Place.

accurate felling date and this can only be obtained for house timbers of oaks. Along with many detailed illustrations, Geoff discussed the history of three buildings.

Firstly, the Old Post Office, first mentioned in a 1694 probate report. Here lived the Needhams, a family of wealthy freehold farmers. An inventory of 1694 totalled £680, the equivalent of £60,000 today. In 1807 the land was sold to George Baxter, of the Building Club – a consortium of businessmen who bought and developed land owned by the Needham family. In the 1800s this became the Vaults Hotel, which lost its licence because 'there were too many pubs in Bingham' in 1930, after which the Post Office moved in from the Market Place. The building divides into three sections. The western part of the elevation onto Long Acre appears younger and was probably re-fronted in Victorian times. A ground floor beam sample indicates a date of 1641 – 73. John Needham had two hearths in 1674 at the time of the hearth tax. The second part, built by son John Needham, gives rise to a date of 1689, and the third (north)

part 1749, built by yet another son. There are many original features: initially the roof was thatched with parapets built at the roof edges to prevent fire spreading (after the Great Fire of London); there is a 'bull's eye' in the brickwork of the side wall (see above) maybe a, now filled, window to light stairs. All fireplaces date from 1720, put in by the third John; in the hall is a superb inglenook fireplace. The 1642 fireback is clearly not original – perhaps it was moved from the old house; or it could be a reproduction. In what was the Courtyard Deli kitchen is a 1749 fireplace. Richard Oliver (b. 1746, d. 1791) and family lived here, he was a maltster and we have his family tree. In 1865 Samuel Hall, a wine and spirit merchant, was the occupant. At some point the thatch was replaced by tile allowing the height of the attic rooms to be raised, perhaps to make them into usable bedrooms. Loft timbers dated 1600-1650 may have been re-used from earlier buildings.

The second building to be discussed was the so-called 'Manor House', a Grade II listed building which cannot be demolished, turns out to be quite an enigma. It has an

unusual header bond frontage, which would make it weak at the corners so this was counteracted by using the stronger stretcher bond to form protruding brick pillars at the sides and in the middle. There is a huge central chimney, dating from before 1760, but no front door. This is round the back where there is also a staircase turret. The newer Georgian roof parapets are for show. The current convex centre piece may have been concave to form a niche for a statue. Records show it was leased to John Bradshaw (d. 1721), a plumber and glazier. His daughter Anne (b.1696) inherited 19 Church Street and married John Markham in 1724. Her brother John inherited the businesses. A date for the house is given as 1752 but perhaps there was another house on this site. In 1841 the house was in the hands of the Baratts and in 1891 the Doncaster family were there, probably being the first to call it 'The Manor House'. The cottages are earlier than the house, and there are later outbuildings. The last building to be considered was 'Beauvale' – another confusing structure. Built on what is thought to be the site of the real manor house, where it is thought the wealthy Richard de Bingham

lived in the 1300s. The house now has a frontage re-modelled c.1840. Three dendro samples were obtained showing 1660 – 1719, and one from the kitchen 1574-1599. An unusual feature is a central cellar, this shows the earliest brickwork, and there is some old brickwork in the central chimney (1780?). Records show the owner Mr Thomas Pacey got married at Langar in 1776.

The wealth of detailed information silenced the large audience, who had no questions, but all greatly appreciated the talk.

PICTURE THE PAST

On 18th April the library put on a great presentation from the project manager for Picture the Past – the Notts/Derby website of historic pictures – www.picturethepast.org.uk/.

Lots of old Binghamites were there and, as invited, brought pictures to be scanned as well as helping identify those from the web site. It was agreed we needed a follow up session where we could do the job in a more organised and less frenetic way! Nick Tomlinson, the project manager, was all for it and BHTA agreed to organize and publicise a second event.

This was arranged for Thursday 16th May with high resolution scanners available to copy old photographs brought in by local residents. At the same time two screens were displaying slide shows from the BHTA and



Putting names to faces.

Picture the Past archives with visitors invited to identify people and events shown so we could add to the information associated with pictures in the two collections.

Between 10.00 and 17.00 we were able to scan a number of previously unseen images of old Bingham and augment the archive records by adding names to many faces and anecdotes relating to past events in the town. Follow-up meetings will be arranged with smaller groups as there are still much more data to be collected. We would like to thank Tim Warner, Petrina Bookley and the rest of the library staff as well as Nick, from Picture the Past, for their enthusiastic support which made this a successful day.

CAN YOU HELP US?

With the approaching centenary of the First World War we are planning to prepare material for our website covering the people and events connected with Bingham over the 1914-1918 period. Mike Patten is leading this project and is searching for photos, letters, newspaper reports, church magazines and any other memorabilia, which includes your family stories and recollections. If you think you have anything of interest that you are prepared to loan us for copying and then return, please ring Mike on 01949 831867.

BINGHAM TOUR GUIDE FOR KIDS!

The new free leaflet, shown below with design and illustrations provided by four Year-9 children from Carnarvon School, is now



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