

DISCOVERING BINGHAM

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

Confused.com?

Mention the 'Manor House' and most people think of the red brick building, c.1700, at the east end of the Market Place. In fact, it never was a Manor House, the first use of this name seems to date from the late 1800s. In this issue we lead with an item on what could be the REAL Manor House!

IS THIS BINGHAM'S LOST MEDIEVAL MANOR HOUSE?

Work has now begun on identifying the finds unearthed in the archaeological test pits dug last year. In early January a specialist in medieval ceramics spent two days looking at the medieval finds. The results are exciting, none more so than regarding those collected in the two pits dug in the front garden of Beauvale House on the north side of the Market Place. John Bannard, who lives there, has long claimed that the 1-metre thick stone east wall in his house is a remnant of an original medieval manor house. This dig seems to confirm that. Both pits yielded lots of medieval pottery fragments, but most interestingly at around 60 cm depth we encountered a demolition layer consisting of building debris and then at about 82 cm we encountered a layer of stones.(see photo right)

We could not decide what the stone feature at 82 cm was. In the first pit it was a metre wide, one stone course thick and set on a thin bed of red clay. It was nearly parallel to the front of the house, so it could have been the foundation course of the front wall to a substantial medieval building. A second pit was dug about four metres to the east. This showed a stone feature at the same depth, but it was up to four courses (20 cm) thick in parts and the extent was greater. As well as medieval pottery several pieces of floor tile were found just above the stone surface, one was glazed and medieval. We concluded that it was likely to be the stone base to a floor. High-class medieval floors were often tiled and laid on a stone foundation layer.

Once we had identified the medieval pottery from the two pits the story became clearer, though most of the medieval pottery types have long time ranges and must be treated with caution because individual pieces cannot be dated accurately within them. Despite this the fragments of pottery were clearly different in age above and below the floor. The pottery under the floor mostly dates to about

1250-1300 with early pieces from 1190-1250, suggesting that the site was already occupied and that the stone and tiled floor might have been laid when rebuilding an existing house. Besides the pottery, building materials, including plaster, were found beneath the floor.

The architectural style of the present Bingham parish church suggests that building started around 1220, and the field walking we did a few years ago shows that in the century after that Bingham was a prosperous place with much land under cultivation. From 1234 to 1266 the estate (manor) was one of the many possessions of the powerful baronial de Ferrars family, Earls of Derby. It seems likely that a high status house was built on this site in the early 1200s possibly for their local steward, who would have managed the Bingham manor.

After the de Ferrars rebelled against the crown in 1266



their estates were confiscated and Bingham was granted to Ralph Bugge, son of a wealthy Nottingham wool merchant. Bugge acquired substantial estates at both Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, where he settled one of his sons and at Bingham where he settled his other son, Richard – named de Bingham – who would have lived in the manor house. Sir Richard was a prominent figure who fought in the Scottish wars against William ('Braveheart') Wallace, was knighted by Edward I, served in two Parliaments, and was Sheriff of the county in 1302. He died between 1308 and 1314 and his mutilated effigy in full armour can be seen in Bingham parish church.

Nearly all the pots found above the floor were made after 1300 AD. While many are dated from 1350 or later most of the earlier ones have a long time range and could also come from that late 14th century period. We found some big lumps of coal at the level of the floor, suggesting that the owner was rich enough to waste it. The inhabitants also appear to have eaten oysters and whelks and lots of meat. Pieces of red-painted plaster may have come from house walls.

Perhaps the most exciting find was this silver coin (1½ x full size) that was unearthed just above the floor. Coin finds are extremely useful for dating the archaeological layer in which they are found. Ours has been



identified as a silver, long-cross, hammered half-penny from the reign of King Edward

I, 1272 to 1307. This suggests that the floor was most likely to have been laid at some time after 1272. While the house was occupied it is unlikely that any broken pot would have been left lying on the floors. Thus the paucity of early 14th century sherds and abundance of sherds dating from 1350 onwards suggests a period of occupancy up to the Black Death (1348/49).

It is highly probable that Sir Richard de Bingham, who would have been rewarded well for his services to the King, built his manor house, complete with a tiled floor over the existing steward's house. His widow Alice continued to live in the house after his death and it was she and their son Sir William who successfully obtained a market charter in 1314 enabling Bingham to become a market town.

The demolition layer at around 60 cm depth contained stone roofing material with holes in them and two of the holes contained rusted iron pegs that would have been used to fix the slate to the roof. Separately, we found rusted iron nails that would have fitted such holes and fragments of glazed ridge tiles. The pottery found above and below this layer shows that it coincided with the Black Death suggesting that the house fell into disuse then. It may be significant that

Sir William de Bingham was almost certainly a victim of this plague, after which his

remaining family lost its wealth and status.

Pottery dating from 1400 or thereabouts reappears above the demolition level so the house might have been reoccupied after a period of disuse. This would coincide with its ownership by Sir Thomas Rempstone, who had been granted the manor by the new King Henry IV in 1399. He was an active soldier operating on the international scene and was handsomely rewarded for helping Henry seize the English crown from Richard II in 1399. He probably rarely lived here as he was accidentally drowned in the Thames in 1406, after which his son spent most of his time in the wars in France. He fought at Agincourt and in 1426 was captured and ransomed by Joan of Arc.

The grant of the manor was subject to the life interest of the last female descendant of the de Bingham family and it is possible Sir William's widow lived in the manor house for a while after his death. Early in the 1400s Sir Thomas' widow, who survived him until her death in 1454, may also have lived there. She was buried beside her husband in the chancel of Bingham parish church. We know that ownership of Bingham manor changed again in about 1460-80, when Brian Stapleton inherited it by marriage. His main home was elsewhere and it is unlikely that he lived in the manor house, but it may have been occupied by junior members of his family or his steward as there is Tudor pottery there, yet to be precisely identified. In the manorial survey of 1586 the manor house is described as being derelict.

The present house has the look of a Victorian farmhouse, and was occupied by the Pacey family in the late 18th to early 20th centuries. If the east wall is medieval stone from the original manor, what of the rest? It seems likely that it remained derelict from 1586 through until after 1776 as no house was recorded on the 1776 map, though there is the possibility of an error here. Before Christmas, we took samples from the main beams of the house for dendrochronological examination (tree ring dating, see September 2012 newsletter) and our house historian has examined the fabric and architecture of the house, the results of which should be available soon. We shall then be able to tell the whole history of the Beauvale House site over the last 800 years.

ALL THE WORLD AND BINGHAM

This memorable phrase is supposed to have been exclaimed by a small boy in the 1850s when it was explained to him what the arrival of the railway in Bingham would mean. The railway almost certainly expedited the emigration to all parts of the 'new world' by many Binghamites – and not all them transportees like the unfortunate Pharoee Scothern, the local villain/character who we have featured in earlier editions!

We regularly receive emails through the web site from people in America, Australia and New Zealand whose



Bingham. Just recently we had a request for our calendar, duly posted to him, from a descendent in Canada of John Strong the postmaster in the mid 19C. Rick is descended from John Bass Strong, who was the first Wesleyan minister to set foot in Canada – so all the world and Canada might have been the cry! This adds to our knowledge of the Strong family, and we were able to put Rick in touch with a local descendent of the family so they can exchange information!

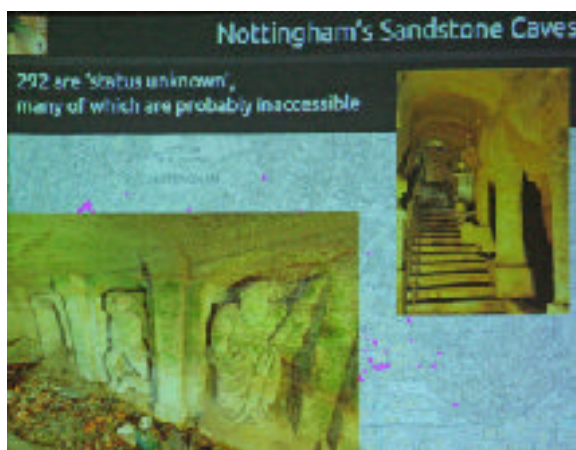
We also heard from a gentleman in New Zealand descended from the Browns, Doncasters and Morrises, including the founder of Hardstaff and Brown (their shop is now Sainsburys). Michael kindly sent us a very old photograph (above) of an ancestor's wedding in Bingham on 23rd September 1909 which again has added to our knowledge and will repay further study when we have time.

We are encouraged by the number of hits the site receives and it is especially interesting to have these overseas contacts with family links to the town. All the world and Bingham indeed!

THE NOTTINGHAM CAVE SURVEY

On Thursday 24th January, Chairman Peter Allen welcomed the audience to the first of three lectures to be given this year. Introducing Dr. David Strange-Walker he said that Trent and Peak Archaeology have been working with BHTA since 2001 on all our projects. David started by explaining that 'The Nottingham Caves Survey' was conducted by a team of two; himself and colleague Julia E Clarke, plus occasional input from other members of T&PA. It builds on the work of many others, especially of the British Geological Survey in the eighties. The project goals were to record, archive, visualise and promote the cave system. The process started with a text record of the ownership and key holder, health and safety issues, usage and facilities, access and a physical description.

Nottingham stands on the flood plain of the Trent and Leam rivers overlooked by sandstone cliffs. The earliest record of man-made caves dates from AD 868 although it is likely that they existed long before that with Nottingham



widely known as 'the Place of Caves'. After the Norman invasion when the castle was built, the Norman French would have resided in the castle area, whilst Anglo Saxons stayed in the area that is now the Lace Market. A 1744 map shows two towns - one at the base of Castle Rock and a second area by Broad and Narrow Marsh.

Some 543 caves were carved in the soft but strong sandstone for a multitude of uses. At Lenton Hermitage, for example, over the centuries, they have served as chapel, royal hunting lodge, bowls club and skittle alley, caravan showroom and bike shed. Nearer the city centre some of the diverse uses identified were as dungeons, summerhouses, garages, restaurants, ice houses, air-raid shelters, stables, cess pits, a shooting range, a cemetery, a tannery and just living accommodation. Other examples shown were of a 'folly cave' filled with life size statues and a flight of steps modelled on a staircase at Haddon Hall. (top left photo)

To obtain an incredibly detailed record of the interiors of the caves and tunnels the team used a state-of-the-art laser scanner. It automatically surveys points in a 360 by 310 degree dome and these data can be processed to give a 3D black and white image known as a 'point cloud'. Digital colour photographs are also taken from each scanner position and when combined with the laser scan data produce 'photo realistic', colour 3D models which when combined as a video give the viewer a virtual tour though the cave complex.

David took his audience on several virtual tours through different caves: Birkin's lace warehouse, which became Mr Plumtree's house and a medieval cave with a well, kiln and 'malting' floor - all part of the brewing process, then onto storage caves below Willoughby House, Low Pavement, with three perfectly circular courts with central pillars, leading to a lounge and wine cellars which illustrated the great skill of

those that excavated this fantastic subterranean world. Those who missed the lecture can experience these virtual tours by visiting the website, www.nottinghamcavessurvey.org.uk.

This major project will impact on the Nottingham Local Plan as planning permission will not be granted on such sites of archaeological significance. These caves are unique in Britain, each cave is fascinating in its own right, but as there are over 500 in number, they are collectively of even greater importance and need to be preserved as a complete system and record of Nottingham's heritage. The audience was very appreciative of this excellent talk and David dealt enthusiastically with the many points raised in the following discussion.

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2013 LECTURES
8.00pm. Methodist Hall
Admission FREE

Thursday 28th March
Roman Nottinghamshire

Mark Patterson

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Thursday 9th May
House Histories and
the Manor House

Geoff Ashton