

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

FIRST LECTURE OF THE SEASON

The first BHTA lecture of 2014, Bingham's Other Railway, was given by Bill Bacon, Chairman of Friends of the Linear Park, to a large audience on Thursday evening, 9th January in the Methodist Hall.

Bill's family have lived in the area for 150 years, two having worked on the 'other' railway, and he was able to paint a fascinating and all-encompassing picture of the landscape through which the Great Northern and London and North Western Joint Railway used to run on its way to Bingham, over the branch line towards Stathern, Melton Mowbray and on to Market Harborough. Opened to take passenger traffic to the Leicester area, freight trains were also very important on the line, in transporting the mined Jurassic ironstone deposits which were found in quantity in that area. Opened in 1879 and closed in 1962, a year before Dr Beeching's first report, happily, some photographs still exist of that old branch line. One shows where it crossed the main road in Bingham, over the long-since demolished bridge. Bill illustrated his lecture with some wonderful old photographs of steam engines and of men working on the ironstone deposits,



cutting great raw ravines through that landscape and in direct contrast to the gentle peace of the area through which the ghost of that old railway now runs.

He then went on to describe some of the wild-life that inhabits what is now the Linear Park, again illustrated with fine photographs. Apparently, some rare plants that would be overwhelmed in a rich soil thrive in the poor soil left behind when the rail tracks were removed. Having been taken up in 1963, by 1971 the track was becoming somewhat overgrown, so a path was laid down and some rather indiscriminate tree planting carried out. Since then, the Linear Park volunteers have ensured that at least the stretch to the Smite is carefully managed and rare species encouraged. It was officially opened by David Bellamy in 2004 and at that time the different species numbered: trees/shrubs - 30, grasses - 170, ferns - 5, birds - 60, butterflies - 30, moths - 60,

fungi - 30. Varied ground levels from deep cutting to embankments throughout the park encourage different species to thrive. Oddly, the best area for wildlife is by the pylons.

Plants like willow herb, kidney-vetch, large-leaved thyme and winter savory (probably brought in by the Romans) were mentioned. Of the fauna, goldfinches, waxwings and harvest mice were all beautifully illustrated and of butterflies, the cabbage whites, so prolific this year, the speckled wood, the common blue, the marbled white, the white-lettered hairstreak (that lives in the tops of elm trees) and many others, some quite rare. The grizzled skipper, a very rare butterfly, lays its eggs on creeping cinquefoil and gives Bingham some claim to fame. For more information and a trail leaflet, go to the BHTA website.

Since 2002 our free lectures have been sponsored by the Members Forum. As this support has ceased, we still aim to avoid charging for admission but there will be a retiring collection for those who wish to help us to cover costs. Our next lecture will be on the 27th March when Peter Allen will reveal what was found in the garden pits.

THE PITS

More of the finds we collected during the digs last summer have been identified. The Roman pots came back in January. They range in age from 1st to 4th centuries, but most were undiagnostic bits of greyware. This is not as bad news as it might seem because it is telling us something about the people who used them; in other words they were not rich. The clay pipes and the stoneware have also been identified. These produced fascinating results for the big dig in Robert Miles Junior School, all the better because they told the same story. All the stoneware from here was dated as first half of the 18th C, while all the clay pipes, identified by Peter Hammond, were dated from the mid 17th to mid 18th centuries. Interestingly, stoneware and clay pipes of different ages were jumbled up in the excavation so that old pieces were as likely to come from the topsoil as the bottom of the excavation. This has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of what went on in this part of the old rectory garden.

Peter Hammond also identified the clay pipes from the 60 test pits for us and found some that were quite unusual. For example there was one from Chester, which Peter says is the first Chester-made pipe found in Nottinghamshire. Another had a mark that he was unable to identify, while another was marked on the stem instead of the bowl, which is more usual. Most of the makers were from Nottingham and included Richard Brinsley, John James, Edward Godfrey, Thomas Crew and a single example by William Sefton. Two of the pipes made by Edward Godfrey were long-bowl types that can be dated precisely to 1710-1713.

Among the 18th to early 19th C pipes was one made by John or William Turpin, the only Newark maker represented in the collection. Others could be attributed to John and Walter Daft and Christopher West, all of Nottingham. The importance of clay pipes is that unlike pottery some can be very closely dated. Again, unlike pottery, which can survive for many years before being broken and thrown out, clay pipes are usually broken very soon after they are used. This means that the dates that clay pipes were made are often the date of disposal.

When we dug in Warner's Paddock we found bits of slag in all the pits, but rather a lot in two of them. We took these to a specialist who lives in Sleaford and she identified them as smithy

slag. One piece was found resting on a sherd of Late Saxon Torksey Ware pottery, which we assume means that the smithy was in operation in the Late Saxon period, that is from the late 9th to mid 11th centuries. It cannot be said if the smithy was a permanent feature of the Warner's Paddock settlement or if the slag was left behind by a peripatetic smith, but whatever the case this adds something to the idea that the settlement here was quite an important one in the years before the Norman conquest.

PLANS FOR MARKET CHARTER CELEBRATIONS TAKE SHAPE

Since our December 2013 edition there have been meetings of the Bingham Town Council Community Committee's Promotion Working Group with representatives of BHTA and other interested parties to plan events to mark the 700th Anniversary starting with the Summer Fair on 14th June and running through the following week. Contact has been made with over 70 local groups, clubs and organisations covering schools, churches, youth, sport, hobby, music, social, charity and business activities.

It is too soon to announce a firm detailed programme but this will be published by the Town Council well before our next quarterly issue of *Discovering Bingham*. There are plans to decorate the Butter Cross in 'Medieval' style, and from Easter we will be producing a series of seven posters, one for each century, since the Market Charter was granted by Edward II in 1314,



Town Mayor Cllr. Tracy Kerry and husband Sean, our guests at November Quiz Supper.

illustrating the national and local major events in each 100 year period. These will be displayed around the Market Place, Library and our smart new Health Centre. The Town's schools are working on ways in which they can participate and under the Youth Enterprise Scheme one group of Toot Hill students have designed a 700th Anniversary commemorative bookmark in faux black leather with gilt lettering as illustrated (half full size) on this page. The bookmarks are on sale, for £1.50 each at the Newsagents in the precinct as well as the Rotary Club bookstall at Saturday Farmers' Markets.

The Parish Church, as our only remaining Medieval building, will feature on the Fair Saturday 14th and a BHTA lecture on the history of the market will be given there during the week. We also hear that the bell-ringers are promising us a rarely heard campanological experience for Bingham!

The Town Council will be launching a children's art competition inviting them to imagine the market place as it might have looked in 1314 and it is hoped their work will be on public display during the week. Starting on Friday 13th BHTA will be digging two one meter square pits on the north side of the square

allowing spectators to see archaeological finds being made live and visit a display of the results of the pit digging project we have carried out over the past two years. A number of children and adult choirs and instrumental groups are planning to entertain us from the Butter Cross. Our local Archers will be illustrating both the modern and Medieval techniques and the Cricketers are proposing a Family Kwik Cricket Tournament. Other groups have indicated interest in taking part in the celebrations and the more events that materialise the more will be the need for teams of volunteers to marshal and give logistical help during the celebrations. Any general offers of assistance can be made to the Town Office at the Court House. Make a note of the dates, 14th to 21st June and clear your diaries!

ONE YOUNG SAILOR'S STORY

The Roll of Honour for the Parish of Bingham records that 16 people served in the Royal Navy during World War One and that only one of them was killed - Able Seaman Percy William Hind.

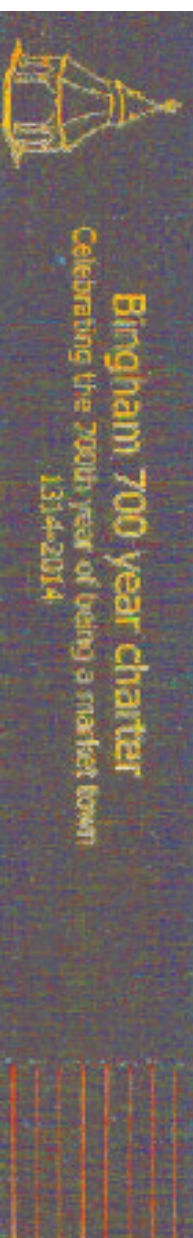
Percy Hind was born on the 29th August 1894 to William and Sarah Hind who were living in Bottesford, Leicestershire. He had an elder brother Thomas and a sister Annie. He clearly wanted a career in the Royal Navy and he joined up as a boy entrant. The 1911 census



Chairman Peter Allen shares a joke with a visitor to the BHTA stall at the Winter Fair last December.

shows that he was an "inmate" at His Majesty's Royal Naval Training Establishment at Shotley, near Ipswich, Suffolk. After training he was assigned to HMS Inflexible, a battle cruiser built in 1907. HMS Inflexible had had an active career up to this point, having been involved in the Battle of the Falklands where the German cruisers Gneisenau and Scharnhorst were sunk.

After the battle Inflexible was repaired and refitted at Gibraltar before setting sail for the Eastern Mediterranean, arriving at the Dardanelles on 24th January 1915. There she took over the role of flagship of the Mediterranean fleet. She bombarded the Turkish fortifications on 19th February, the start of the Battle of Gallipoli, to little effect, and again on 15th March with the same results. It was during the action on 15th March that Percy Hind was killed and his next of kin was shown as his Mother Sarah living in Moor Lane, Bingham. He was buried at sea and his name is recorded on the memorial at Chatham dockyard. Percy Hind was the 3rd person from Bingham to have been killed in action and one of the youngest at the age of 20.



SIR RICHARD de BINGHAM AND OUR MARKET

During the reign of King Edward I in the late 1200s England enjoyed a warm climate and a boom economy. Harvests were plentiful and the export trade in wool was bringing prosperity to sheep farmers and wool merchants. A wealthy Nottingham wool merchant called Ralph Bugge invested his profits in buying land to set up his two sons as landed gentry. One was given land at Willoughby among the sheep pastures of the Wolds and the other, Richard, became lord of Bingham manor in the corn-growing belt of the Vale of Belvoir. Many landowners at this period sought to develop their villages as market towns, with varying degrees of success. Such developments required royal approval and charters were granted to Granby in 1252 and Colston Bassett in 1257, both of which came to nothing. However, Richard de Bingham was more successful at Bingham, where he almost certainly laid out a planned town as a formal grid, with three parallel east-west roads linked by several north-south cross lanes around a nucleus of a large rectangular market place.

It was probably Richard who applied to the new King Edward II for a market charter but it was not granted until after his death in 1311 and

then to his widow Alice and his heir William de Bingham in 1314. This sanctioned the still existing weekly Thursday market as well as an annual six-day fair commencing on 28th October. The fair was originally held in the 'Fair Close' or 'Fair Field' roughly on the site of the present car park and health centre, etc and still commemorated by the name of Fairfield St. Richard was thus effectively the founder of Bingham as we know it today and an important local figure. He was knighted by Edward I, and fought in the Scottish wars against William ('Braveheart') Wallace in 1297-1299. However, twice in his career he was accused of murder but managed to get off. This may be the reason why in 1302 he obtained licence to found a private family chapel endowed with a priest to say prayers for his soul! The chapel - dedicated to St Helen - stood at the corner of the Kirkhill and School Lane, where several skeletons, presumably of his family, were unearthed some years ago. We do not know why the chapel was sited there, as his manor house appears to have occupied the whole of the north side of the Market Place. Here a silver sixpence of Edward I's reign was dug up last year during a BHTA excavation. Sir Richard's life-sized effigy in full armour can be seen in Bingham parish church.

Unfortunately the year 1314 turned out to be an inauspicious time to set up a market. Following a great storm and flooding the previous year, a long hot summer of 1314 resulted in a disastrous harvest, the first of four successive years of famine and hardship followed by a national outbreak of cattle plague. The good times were coming to an end as the climate grew increasingly colder, ushering in a period later dubbed the 'Little Ice Age'. Let us hope that history does not repeat itself in the 21st century!

Follow us on  ?

In an effort to reach a wider audience and to communicate more effectively with members and friends BHTA is considering launching its own Facebook page. Design work has begun and we hope to have it live by the date of the next Newsletter. If any reader has experience of designing or working with organisational Facebook pages, the Membership Secretary (David Mason 01949 876635) would be pleased to receive any advice or suggestions you may have about how to maximise our profile and the effectiveness of the page.

2014 LECTURES
8.00pm. Methodist Hall
Admission is FREE
but donations towards costs are appreciated

Thursday 27th March
Bingham Three Feet Under
Quest for Origin of the Town
Peter Allen

Thursday 22nd May
Bingham's World Wars
Mike Patten

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