

THOROTON



No. 36: Summer 2004

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, KEYWORTH – 24 APRIL

Once again the Society managed to keep business to a minimum at the AGM – this year held in Keyworth, which boasts a very well appointed village hall – with the added bonus of a cricket match going on outside (this did tend to distract the attention of one or two of the attendees!)

In his remarks, our Chairman John Beckett thanked those who contributed to the life of the Society, pointing out the widening variety of activities and opportunities afforded members; and he also drew attention to the excellent volume of *Transactions*, now with many full colour illustrations. The business of the meeting



included the election of Officers and the Council. This year we have two new recruits: Leslie Cram, who picks up the traces of programme management from Jean Nicholson, who has retired after many years of sterling work; and Alan Langton joins Council. We are pleased to welcome them both (see page 2 for further information).

Following on from the business of the Annual General Meeting, Mr. Bob Hammond gave a brief but detailed history of the village of Keyworth, and acted as our guide when we visited the small parish church of Saint Mary Magdalene. A Society Annual General Meeting would not be complete without an excellent tea, and this one was no exception – a

splendid feast laid on by the ladies of Keyworth W.I. The only slight hitch was the late arrival of the coach for return to Nottingham: anxious moments as the Chairman contemplated squeezing eighteen members into his car! But the coach did eventually arrive, rounding off an interesting afternoon. [Picture from left: Leslie Cram, President Neville Hoskins, Chairman John Beckett, Alan Langton].

Barbara Cast

75th Anniversary of 'new' Council House Opening

During the afternoon of 22 May 1929, in glorious weather, architect T. Cecil Howitt handed the golden key of the new Council House to the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII). The Prince then officially opened the Council House and Processional Way. No-one doubted the significance of the occasion, and the neo-baroque building was pronounced a major civic success. Three-quarters of a century later the Council House continues to be a main focus in the city, its classical features a timeless tribute to Howitt's design of 1924.

On 20 May this year the new Lord Mayor of Nottingham, Cllr John Hartshorne, marked the 75th Anniversary of the official opening of the Council House with a civic reception in the principal reception hall, reputedly a replica of the

ballroom in the Palace of Versailles. Invitees included members of the Civic Society and the Thoroton Society, key Nottingham figures, and elderly guests - some having been present at the Council House opening, and others having worked there.

The evening also saw the launch of *The Council House and Old Market Square* (see page 2). After the Lord Mayor's welcome, during which he spoke of the history of the Council House and of his hopes for its future, and speeches by Hilary Sylvester (chair of Nottingham Civic Society), John Beckett and Ken Brand, guests were entertained to a buffet reception. The Lord Mayor and Sheriff, Cllr Derek Cresswell, then cut the celebratory cake, and honorary aldermen gave guests a guided tour of the building.

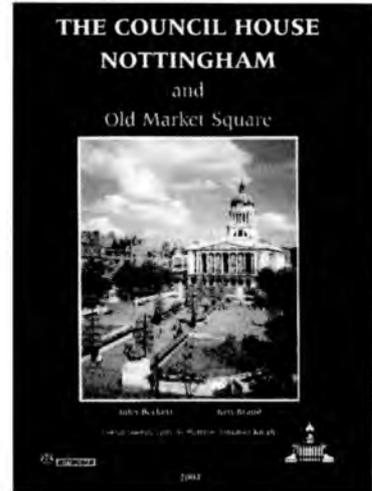
~ The Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire ~

~ The County's Principal Historical Society ~

Visit the Thoroton Website at: www.thorotonsociety.org.uk

The Council House and Old Market Square

The 75th Anniversary of the official opening of the Council House saw the launch of this richly-illustrated publication, co-written by John Beckett and Ken Brand. The book documents the history of the New Exchange Hall, a modest red brick building erected at the eastern end of the market place in 1724-26, and redesigned 1814-15. However a new age of town hall building from the 1830s, when such towns as Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds built on a previously unknown grand scale, the Exchange was considered outdated, and there was an overwhelming preference in Nottingham for a building in the classical style. There followed over seventy years of behind-the-scenes wrangling, before the 'new' Council House was completed, along with the contentious laying out of the Old Market Square. The prime mover of the project, Alderman Herbert Bowles, allegedly dreamed up the scheme in one evening with the Housing Surveyor, T. Cecil Howitt. After the opening Howitt's design was criticized by local ratepayers when the Council House was closed to the public, by the architectural establishment, and by the modernist movement, including Pevsner, who thought the design old-fashioned and provincial. Howitt went on to design further major buildings in and outside Nottingham, and after his death in 1968 *The Times* reported the Council House was 'probably still the finest municipal building outside of London'. This splendid book gives a fascinating insight into the internal politics leading up to the building of the 'new' Council House, and takes the reader on a guided tour. Currently available from the Information Bureau and local bookshops, it will be on sale at Thoroton lectures at a reduced rate to members.



Janice Avery

NEW APPOINTMENTS

LESLIE CRAM – THOROTON PROGRAMME SECRETARY

Leslie Cram has known Nottingham and Nottinghamshire since 1953 when his family moved to Hucknall. After that the family home was in the Vale of Belvoir, at Bingham, then just over the border into Leicestershire. Four years ago he retired to Harby, and joined the Thoroton Society.

Leslie's deepest interest in the past is the Old Stone Age and stone tools, and also animal bones and footprints. Previously he worked in Berkshire as Principal Curator for the museum service of Reading Borough Council with the special collections of Thames Valley Handaxes, Mesolithic Thatcham, Roman Silchester and Reading Abbey and its ruined remains. While there he was involved in archaeology and planning, sites and monuments records, rescue archaeology and excavation units. He also arranged lectures and excursions, working with the Berkshire Archaeological Society, and Reading University Continuing Education Department. Leslie admires how the Thoroton Society brings together as equals all people interested and involved in the history and archaeology of the county, ranging from the amateur to those employed in posts responsible for the past.



ALAN LANGTON – MEMBER OF THOROTON COUNCIL

Born in Nottingham, Alan's interest in local history was initially inspired by a school project in 1949, when Nottingham was celebrating the Quincentenary of the granting of its Charter. His awareness of the Thoroton Society came about through an article in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* on the Society's activities associated with the Quincentenary. An alert and inspirational history teacher then arranged for him, through the kindness of Mr Holland Walker, to have Associate Membership of the Society for an annual fee of seven shillings!

Alan subsequently read History under Professor A.C. Wood at the University of Nottingham, and after a time at Birmingham, he returned to Nottingham to teach. His last post was as headteacher of South Wolds Comprehensive School, Keyworth, which he held for 13 years. Since retiring in 1994 Alan has been able to devote more time to Thoroton Society activities, and looks forward to taking an active part in Council matters. His other main interest has been associated with the Diocese of Southwell, as a Reader for forty years, a member of the Council of Churches Together in Nottinghamshire, and Vice Chair of Governors of a Church of England School. For 'purely selfish enjoyment' he is a keen gardener, a reasonably energetic walker, and an amateur organist.



It is with sadness that we have to report the death of Dr John Samuels, a member of Thoroton's Editorial Committee, who died on Saturday 19 June. An obituary will follow in the next Newsletter.

REPORT OF LECTURES AND EXCURSIONS

Friday 5 March – Launch of the Newcastle Diaries

Nearly ninety people gathered in the University of Nottingham's Senate Chamber for the launch of the most recent publication in Thoroton Record Society's series, Dr Richard Gaunt's edition: *Unhappy Reactionary: the Diaries of the Fourth Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne, 1822-50*. The event was jointly hosted by the Thoroton Society and the School of History at Nottingham University.

Lynda Crawford spoke about the Newcastle collection and recent cataloguing work, Richard Gaunt talked about the work he had undertaken in editing the diaries for publication, and Dorothy Johnston discussed the Newcastle family portraits now housed in the Senate Chamber, as well as the 4th Duke's attitude towards having his portrait painted.

The book was officially launched by Clive Priestley, whose own study of the 2nd Duke of Newcastle was completed in 1958. Clive, who was one of the first researchers to work on the Newcastle papers after they were deposited in the 1950s, went on to a successful career in the Civil Service, but still retains an interest in his alma mater. Alan Langton was among those attending who were able to reminisce with Clive about the function in their student days of what is today the Senate Chamber. This was a splendid evening!

John Beckett

Saturday 13 March – The Park and Gardens at Clumber



Neil Porteus, Head Gardener at Clumber Park, delighted a large gathering of members and friends to a talk about the park and gardens at Clumber. Using old maps and the many plans drawn by John Simpson in the 1780s for the 2nd Duke of Newcastle, Neil showed the elaborate arrangement of alleys and rides and the varieties of trees used – many of these still exist today. We marvelled not only at the vision of these men who planted for the future with no hope of seeing their schemes mature, but also at the vast sums of money spent and the number of men employed to keep the gardens in good order. Today only three gardeners, including Neil (*pictured left*) are employed full-time.

Old photographs transported us back to the age of elegance, when the terraces between the house and lake were ablaze with colour and the gravelled walks lined with statues collected by the Newcastles on their Grand Tours. Until recently it was thought that all trace of the alcoves and statues had disappeared, but Neil has found some buried in the undergrowth. Within the next few years he hopes to have some of the walks restored and the statues back in place. Neil ended his talk with an outline of his plans for the continued restoration of the kitchen garden, which already provides seasonal fruit and vegetables for the Clumber restaurant, and for 'taster days' when old varieties can be tried and compare with the often tasteless supermarket varieties.

Jean Nicholson

Saturday 8 May – Excursion to Roche Abbey, Conisbrough Castle and Brodsworth Hall



The first excursion of the season took us to three English Heritage sites in South Yorkshire. Squeezing down a green and narrow lane, we saw in a grassy clearing the ruins of Roche Abbey (*pictured left*), which was founded by Cistercian monks in 1147. The setting was landscaped in the eighteenth century by Capability Brown. We then travelled on to Conisbrough Castle (*pictured right*), whose 90-ft high buttressed keep, which was built around 1185, is the oldest



surviving circular keep in England, with fine views from the top. Afterwards lunch was taken in the grounds of the Castle, and some Society members visited St Peter's church to look at Saxon work on arcades and monuments.

The afternoon was spent at Brodsworth Hall, a Victorian country house designed in the Italian style and built in the 1860s. Here we saw the 'Maids and Mistresses' exhibition, depicting the lives of women who lived or worked there. After viewing the faded grandeur of the Hall we strolled in the restored garden and worked up an appetite for a scrumptious tea in true Thorotonian tradition. Grateful thanks go to Bob Creates for leading a very interesting and full day, and to Peter Reddish for his assistance with the research.

Glenice Pringle

REMINDER OF FORTHCOMING SPECIAL GUEST LECTURE:

**FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2004: 'Meet the Ancestors' with Julian Richards (archaeologist and TV presenter)
7.30pm, Lecture Theatre 1, The Exchange, Nottm University's Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham**

ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY FRONT...

Sarah Speight reports on events in and around the county

- Nottinghamshire Castles: fieldwork is ongoing or planned in 2004 at Annesley, Worksop, Clipstone, Laxton and Greasley. To bring this work together and provide a broader county and national context, a one-day conference is planned for 12 March 2005. This has been organized by the Centre for Local History, University of Nottingham, in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and the Sherwood Forest Initiative. The conference will aim to address how castles develop, their role within the local community and the forest, and their material culture. Findings to date will be presented, a range of possible interpretations aired, and the audience will be invited to contribute to the most wide-ranging study of Nottinghamshire castles ever undertaken. Further detail from Sarah Speight, Centre for Local History, University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham.
- An excavation is scheduled to commence 21 June for 2-4 weeks on a Romano-British site at Raymoth Lane, Worksop. For further information contact chris.robinson@nottscc.gov.uk
- A survey of Laxton is planned for the Autumn.
- Continuing Education (Nottingham University of Nottingham is hoping to run a documentary research and buildings survey course based at Mapperley Hospital next Autumn, to record the building in advance of its conversion into an arts space.

Upper Palaeolithic Cave Art in Nottinghamshire: Conference Report

Art on cave walls of Upper Palaeolithic people – homo sapiens just like ourselves – has been found for the first time in Britain, and it comes from Church Hole at Creswell Crags in Nottinghamshire. The art was recognized in 2003 by two British archaeologists, and one, with the ‘eye’, from Spain. It is in the form of engravings high above the present floor level and tucked away at the back of the cave – an ibex or deer, a wild ox, birds and strange symbolic forms. It is immediately recognizable in the style so well known in the caves in France and Spain. The colder and damper British climate has probably removed paintings and covered over many engravings with dripstone in our caves.

An international conference ‘Creswell Art in European Context’ was run by the Creswell Crags Museum & Education Centre and the University of Sheffield in Creswell village from 15-17 April, bringing speakers from English Heritage, the British Museum, and universities in England and across Europe. Access for the general public to see the engravings is a challenge yet to be resolved, but the images and details can be seen on the internet (see sites below) – and one of the discoverers of the art will tell us the story at our lecture in January 2005. Leslie Cram http://www.creswell-crags.org.uk/CHT/News_and_views/index.html;

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/archaeology/conf/creswell/creswell.htm> ; <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~capra/5/peittitt.html>

A CEILING SAGA

When Peter Smith gave his lecture on 18th-century town houses in Nottingham (January 2004), he showed us a picture of, and talked about, the Oriental Café on Wheelergate which was demolished, after some protests by the Society, in 1961. The spectacular seventeenth-century ceiling was, however, taken down and stored for some years at Eastcroft, and it was subsequently taken to Holme Pierrepont Hall.

Some of us were reminded of the controversy a few years ago when it transpired that the ceiling had been acquired as ‘architectural salvage’ by Mr Peter Hone in London, and there were rumours about the eventual destination of this Nottingham treasure. There has now been a further twist to the saga, and by the time you read this it will probably have a new owner – the 20 x 16-ft. masterpiece was auctioned at

Sotheby’s, Sussex, in May, but failed to reach its reserve (as yet we do not know what the reserve price was). Where it will finish up is again uncertain – but watch this space!

The importance of the Oriental Café ceiling is emphasized by an article in the May issue of *World of Interiors*: a two-page colour spread of the whole ceiling, and two further pages of text and photographs of details. The magazine is not widely available after publication, but libraries sometimes have a copy, and it is well worth looking out for.

The article concludes: ‘thus this most itinerant of ceilings will be on the move again, and this time, one hopes, it will finally fulfil its rightful role as the architectural centrepiece of a suitably grandiose manor’. But not, sadly, in its rightful home, in Nottingham. **Neville Hoskins**

I regret that, due to an administrative reorganization, I am no longer permitted to support the Thoroton Society during office hours. Please send contributions for *Newsletter* No. 37 by 1 August 2004 to: Janice Avery, 43 Derby Road, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 2TB; tel: 0115 943 0346; email: janice.avery@nottingham.ac.uk
The views expressed in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Society or its Council.