

THOROTON



No. 37: Autumn 2004

SUMMER GARDEN PARTY: Bromley House, Nottingham, 20 June 2004



A new event on the Thoroton calendar: a summer garden party. Pick the middle of June and what do you get? Well, rain, of course. So the plans for sitting outside in the garden of Bromley House had to be amended to standing outside, and having the food inside. Being British, we coped. Seventy-seven members and guests attended. Music was provided by Ian Reeve and supporters, and tea was served by Heather Wilkinson and her helpers. The rain did produce one bonus – Julia Wilson, librarian at

Bromley House, kindly opened the library, and led several tours of the building. Members were able to see and, if they chose, to have their tea in the Thoroton Room. Several took away membership applications for this splendid library set in the heart of Nottingham and yet apparently untouched by the buzz of the city. Grateful thanks go to Neville Hoskins and his team of helpers, which included David Hoskins, Peter Reddish, Alan Langton and others, for making the day such a success. Last but not least, thanks go to Elizabeth Robinson, who maintains the garden at Bromley House, and for looking after the tree we planted a couple of years ago (see Newsletter No. 29) **John Beckett**

The Plague of 1604

Bleasby has just commemorated, with a series of events, the visitation of a plague to the parish in 1604 which wiped out something like a third to a half of the population. 104 people died that year, whereas the usual annual number of burials around that time was four to five. Research has thrown up a number of places which were affected in this epidemic which started in 1602 – Newark and

Worksop had outbreaks and a couple of smaller places, Morton and Linby, had two possible cases each. But nothing of the scale of losses of any other small place like Bleasby has emerged so far. If anyone knows of other outbreaks in Nottinghamshire in 1604 I would be very interested to hear of it: in which case, would you please contact Barbara Cast at bicast@aol.com.

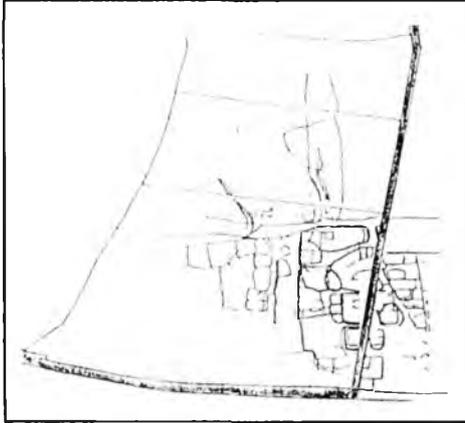
FORTHCOMING SPECIAL GUEST LECTURE:
FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2004, 7.30pm: 'Meet the Ancestors' with Julian Richards
(archaeologist and TV presenter) University of Nottingham Jubilee Campus –
see enclosed flier for further information.

~ The Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire ~
~ The County's Principal Historical Society ~
Visit the Thoroton Website at: www.thorotonsociety.org.uk

AUTUMN LECTURE SERIES

Lectures will take place at the YMCA, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham at 2.45 pm unless otherwise stated.

Saturday 9 October: Mr Peter Connelly, Senior Archaeologist of the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit, 'The Archaeology of Besthorpe Quarry: A Prehistoric and Romano-British landscape in North Nottinghamshire'.



Excavations began in 2000 in advance of gravel extraction with the main funding coming from LaFarge, the quarry operators. It is now a summer university training excavation for Manchester University students, in association with Liverpool, and Nottingham Universities. It may extend for a further ten years. Results so far are the uncovering of Neolithic/Bronze Age finds with an enclosure beside a previous riverbed of the Trent, with wood giving a radio carbon date of c.3400 BC. Then there are two centres of settlement on the gravel of Iron Age running into Romano-British date, possibly by a fording point of the Trent. Discoveries include the ditch boundaries between fields, material from a building with a tiled roof and heating system and pottery of local production and imported from abroad. An unusual aspect of the project is the experimental archaeology of ditches to investigate rates of infill. In 2005 a Society excursion will visit the dig. See www.art.man.ac.uk/FieldArchaeologyCentre/Besthorpe.htm for

further information. [Picture above: the crop marks at Besthorpe as they appeared in the 1980s.]

Tuesday 12 October, 7.30pm: The Keith Train Lecture, Friends Meeting House, Clarendon Street

The speaker will be Bill Taylor of Hopkins Architects: title of lecture to be announced at a future Thoroton Society meeting, and on the Nottingham Civic Society website – if you have Internet access you can check this on: <http://www.nottinghamcivicsociety.org.uk>.

Saturday 13 November: The Nottinghamshire History Lecture – Dr Paul Elliott, Research Associate, School of Geography, Nottingham University, 'British Enlightenment Culture in a Regional Centre: Scientific Personalities, Ideas and Institutions in Nottingham, c. 1700-1840'.

Scientific ideas and activities were important in a multiplicity of sites and contexts during the 18th and 19th centuries, from domestic libraries, globes and telescopes to public displays of galvanism on sheep's heads in local theatres. Scientific ideas were also invoked in the many public contexts of Georgian urban sociability including coffee house and tavern discussions, and in the activities of various associations such as agricultural societies and the Lunar and the Derby Philosophical Societies. The paper argues that scientific culture was an important facet of Nottingham life, and that in this respect the town can be compared to other similar county and manufacturing centres such as Derby. It explores the role of local and itinerant lecturers in natural philosophy who visited Nottingham and assesses the prominence of scientific subjects in the curricula of tutors and educational institutions. It examines the activities of organisations such as the Nottingham Mechanics' Institute and the Bromley House Library, explores the role of local professionals such as clergy, lawyers and medical men as publicists and practitioners of Nottingham science, and considers whether local scientific culture had distinctive characteristics.

Saturday 11 December: Dr Rosalys Coope, 'Newstead: The First Lord Byron's "Great Dining Room"'

The present day visitor to this room at Newstead, which is now known as 'The Salon', sees a fair recreation of a grand Victorian drawing room with some obviously older features. Its history however goes far beyond most of these older features and through the centuries the room has undergone many changes, some quite dramatic, both in structure and décor. Through archaeological exploration and with the aid of 18th and early 19th century drawings and letters it is possible to gain a better idea of it both as the refectory of the Augustinian Priory and as the great room which the then Sir John Byron made in the 1630s. The most remarkable feature of Byron's transformation of this room was the plaster decoration of the ceiling, which still survives today and is shown here in an 18th-century drawing. [Picture right: The Great Dining Room, Newstead Abbey - Drawing of 1755 by S. H. Grimm]



REPORTS OF RECENT LECTURES AND EXCURSIONS

Nottingham's Eighteenth-Century Town Houses – 30 May and 27 June

Following on from his lecture on 10 January, Peter Smith led walks around Nottingham to visit the 18th-century town houses, with numbers being limited. Peter's eloquent explanations of the buildings and his ability to maintain his voice meant that on both occasions he kept up our interest. **Leslie Cram**

Note: Newsletter No. 31 drew members' attention to a series of papers by Peter Smith in the Georgian Group Journal. His latest addition to the history of Wollaton Hall is a 28-page paper in the Spring 2004 *Journal of the Garden History Society*. With the intriguing title 'The Sundial Garden and the House-plan mount, two gardens at Wollaton Hall, Nottinghamshire, by Robert (c1535-1614) and John (-1634) Smythson', it explores a little-known aspect of the Willoughbys' activities. In Peter's usual authoritative style, it is well worth looking for – though not every library has a copy. **Neville Hoskins**

Coughton Court – 12 June

Coughton Court is a National Trust property near Alcester in Warwickshire. It is one of England's finest Tudor houses, and has been the home of the Throckmorton family since 1409, and houses a fine collection of furniture and porcelain. The Throckmortons are Roman Catholics, and there is a particularly interesting exhibition which, while being a testament to the steadfastness of their faith, graphically illustrates the saga of the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics over the centuries. The story of the Gunpowder Plot is vividly displayed – as is the account of the life of Nicholas Owen, master priest hole builder – so fine a craftsman that some of his work probably still remains to be discovered. The walled garden, with its herbaceous borders and rose labyrinth, was a great attraction to our members. After tea at Tutbury we moved on to Melbourne church, a mini-cathedral, with its magnificent Norman interiors. Built by the Bishops of Carlisle when the Scots border raiding parties came too close for comfort, its massive Norman pillars and arches seem oddly out of place in this quiet little Derbyshire town. The day ended with a magnificent display by the Red Arrows at nearby Donington Park. We are grateful to leader and guide, Dr Ann Hope.



Keith Goodman

North Nottinghamshire Churches – 3 July



Five more North Nottinghamshire churches were visited on July 3rd – those of Gamston, North Leverton, South Leverton, Laneham and Rampton. Each brought its own fascination; each was impressive. The broad high tower of St Peter's Gamston drew us to our first church. Fifteenth-century clerestory windows ensure that the first impression is one of light. We appreciated being able to handle the beautiful Gamston chalice made in 1569. Next was St. Martin's church, North Leverton, which incorporates a range of styles-the south doorway, being magnificent late Norman. The church of All Saints, South Leverton, dates back to the 12th century [see picture

above]. Graceful arcades are thirteenth-century originals. By contrast, beautiful quilted pictures honour the recent millennium. This is a much-loved building kept in tip-top condition.

Our next church, St Peter's, Laneham has a porch built in 1932 housing a Norman south doorway. Its ancient original door hangs on the adjacent wall. In the chancel herringbone masonry indicates the Saxon-Norman transition. Of note were the solid oak pews, the Markham memorial and the 14th century stained glass. Finally, the church of Rampton All Saints is essentially medieval in origin, and the wall type piscina is thought to be one of the earliest in the county. Five solid, ancient buildings – architecturally interesting, but telling us also of the unknown thousands of worshippers whose faithful love sustained these churches over centuries. Our excursion leaders Jean Nicholson and Michael Jackson did us proud. We were also very well fed, thanks to Jean and her team. It was a stimulating day. **Barbara Maddison**

Report of visit to Brewhouse Yard – 10 June

Brewhouse Yard, or – to give it the official title – the Museum of Nottingham Life, is known to many local people, but what happens behind the scenes, notably in the adjoining Waterworks Building which is part of the complex? Members who booked early – apologies to those who were disappointed – found the answer to this question rather more complex than they imagined. Under the careful guidance of Suella Postles and Ann Inckster, we were introduced to a range of resources seldom seen by the public, including artefacts from Africa and other parts of Europe.

We learned about how the museum service classifies everything it owns, and about some of

the hidden treasures which are only occasionally on show to the public. We also learned about Mr Champion, the motorbike man who led Thoroton archaeological work in the 1930s – does anyone remember him? – and about the massive backlog bequeathed to the service by the last city archaeologist. If and when it gets written up, the material will provide many of the missing links in our understanding of medieval Nottingham.

And, finally, Suella and Ann are always on the lookout for volunteers – so if you are interested and able to offer them any help with their work, please give Suella a ring on 0115-9153602.

John Beckett

OBITUARY: DR JOHN SAMUELS

The death of John Samuels at the age of 51 has removed from British archaeology one of its most colourful and stimulating members. He was born and schooled near Gravesend, where he began his life-long study of archaeology, by visits to the prehistoric and Roman antiquities of the Downs. Early excavations included seasons with Brian Philp, and a meeting with Paul Ashbee, which led to working with him on excavations and fieldwork in the Scillies, and to a friendship which continued through his life. The department of archaeology at Cardiff, then with Richard Atkinson, Leslie Alcock and Mike Jarrett in post, strongly favoured excavation and practical work, and it was natural for John to go there for his undergraduate studies. His fieldwork included several seasons at Dragonby, Lincs., and, encouraged by Jarrett and the site's director, Jeffrey May, he undertook the study of the Roman pottery, a vast pile of



boxes in the basements of Normanby Hall. This corpus, and its comparanda, formed the core of his PhD thesis, published in 1983. Meanwhile John worked as a field officer for the Humberside Archaeological Committee, facilitating the construction of the M180 motorway (1975-6), and then transferred to the University of Nottingham, where he worked for four years with May, processing the results of the Dragonby excavations, helped with the survey and excavations of medieval Welsh houses with Philip Dixon, and undertook a season's excavations at the Old White Hart, Newark.

These medieval experiences helped John when, in 1980, he was appointed assistant director of the Liverpool Rescue Unit, his principal work being at the ruined mansion of Lydiat Hall, where he combined survey and excavation to present a picture of its building and decay. In 1981 he returned to the East Midlands as tutor organiser for the WEA in Nottinghamshire. As is natural for a tutor in his position, John's courses spanned a wide range, from the

prehistoric period to modern times, and included local studies far removed from his original work in Roman pottery. His teaching was widely popular, and his classes full. His familiarity with medieval buildings led to classes on the buildings of Newark, and interesting studies of the peasant houses of the Nottinghamshire countryside. Publication of some of these studies led John to set up the Cromwell Press, which under his direction published widely on countryside and historical subjects related in particular to Nottinghamshire. In 1989 he resigned from his official post, and set up as a consultant archaeologist, continuing his work with Cromwell Press, and joining in the management of the local group of the CBA.

The success of his consultancy (known as JSAC) led to a great increase of business, and a widening of the scope of his work. In 1996 he established his credentials in a complex field by co-writing the widely praised *Archaeology in Law*, and was increasingly sought as advisor on a range of developments, including the Stonehenge project and the Channel tunnel. John was a stimulating and entertaining companion, who enjoyed debate and was on occasion controversial. He was blessed with a robust sense of what was reasonable, and had no hesitation in pointing this out. His contacts ran far beyond the archaeological world, and he particularly relished his clubs, especially the Savages. An evening with John was guaranteed to be humorous, exuberant and instructive. He is a very sad loss. **Philip Dixon**

Please send contributions for *Newsletter* No. 38 by 7 November 2004 to:

Janice Avery, 43 Derby Road, Beeston, Nottingham.

The views expressed in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Society or its Council.
