



Nottinghamshire
County Council

Sherwood Archaeological Initiative Newsletter

Spring 2005 - Issue 2

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter. In this edition we bring you news on the Butterstumps and on Hayman Rooke, a potted history of King John in Nottinghamshire, and an insight into work going on at Moor Pond Wood in Papplewick. In addition we bring you the usual updates on our fieldwork and surveying, and on the castles project and conference.

Hayman Rooke and the Butterstumps

The Sherwood Initiative are involved in a number of projects in Mansfield Woodhouse. At present work is being undertaken in conjunction with Mansfield District Council and the Mansfield Woodhouse Society to improve the site of the 'Butterstumps'. The Butterstumps are a semi-circle of octagonal stone bollards or pillars, situated at the junction of the A60 and the B6032. They were put there in the late 1700's by Major Hayman Rooke, one of Britain's earliest archaeologists. He lived in the house on this corner that can still be seen today. Major Rooke was an early archaeologist and organised excavations of burial mounds in Derbyshire and of the Roman villa outside Mansfield Woodhouse. He was an avid writer and drew sketches of all that interested him. He was fascinated by the trees of Welbeck and Sherwood, especially one oak in particular, which he described as;

'a most curious ancient oak' ... 'no one can behold this majestic ruin without pronouncing it to be of very remote antiquity; and might venture to say, that it cannot be much less than a thousand years old'.

This magnificent oak was later renamed 'Major Oak', after Major Rooke.

The project at the Butterstumps was aimed at improving the presentation of the stones, and putting up an information board. The site improvement is now complete; the footpath and bench have been moved and the site levelled and re-turfed. In addition two of the missing stumps have been reinstated. The work was overseen by an archaeologist from the Initiative.



The Butterstumps undergoing renovation under the watchful eyes of Gary James and John Stevens of Mansfield District Council.

But what were the stumps for? They get their name from the days when women sold butter from this corner. They used to put their butter churns on the stumps to keep them off the ground. Major Rooke was fascinated by the Druids and some suggest that the stones were put in to imitate a stone circle. Others make the more practical suggestion that they were traffic bollards to stop coaches coming too close to the Major's front gate.

Do you have any suggestions about the purpose of the Butterstumps? Write and let us know your ideas, whether they are serious or silly!

Fieldwork Update!

Despite the cold snap the archaeologists and volunteers have been pressing on with fieldwork. In December we fieldwalked outside Edwinstowe near the site of St Edwin's chapel. Three days in the bitter cold yielded depressingly few finds. The stalwart few who dared brave the cold learnt the important archaeological lesson that sometimes there is just nothing to find. But as the saying goes 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence', and finding nothing can be informative too.

In Sherwood Forest Country Park we have been tracing the course of a holloway that stretches all the way across Birklands. In places it is so deep and broad that we were able to do cross-sectional survey of it.



Linda Mallet tucks into a pancake on Shrove Tuesday while out in the Forest.

Elsewhere in the park we investigated a feature on the far boundary of the park. Here 50 metre long ditches for three sides of a square, though as yet we're not sure what it is. At lunchtime the hard-working volunteers were treated to pancakes!



Cathy and Emily beam with joy as they stand on their new-found ridge and furrow!

Closer to the visitor centre we discovered what may be a mediaeval woodbank as well as the barest traces of ridge and furrow! We also continued following one of the hollow ways right up the the Visitor Centre car park.

In Thieves Wood near Mansfield we have been surveying a number of man-made water channels. It is not known whether these were drainage channels from when the land was first turned over to the Forestry Commission, or whether they are much older.

Also in Thieves Wood are a large number of earthworks and features running alongside the A60. We made a brief walkover of the area and decided that it is definitely worth further investigation!



We almost lose Richard Hudson in the undergrowth as he gets carried away with recording!

Most of the fieldwork is now being put on hold but will begin again in the autumn. This is so that we can write up the results of the past year-and-a-bit of surveying, and arrange a new set of places for us to survey. The archaeologists would like to say a big thankyou to all the volunteers; we couldn't do this without you!

Local Tales

We are hoping to run a regular section of people's memories or local tales. Oral history is a valuable resource of information that is so easily lost. Local legends, traditions, or superstitions can fill in gaps in our knowledge of the past, and bring it to life in a very human way.

Send us your memories, tales, myths or superstitions and we'll print as many as we can in the next newsletter.

Newark's Golden Past

A Nottinghamshire metal detector enthusiast and former amateur archaeologist has uncovered a gold torc in a field near Newark. It was late in the day on a Saturday afternoon when Maurice Richardson uncovered what he initially thought was scrap metal. However, careful excavation revealed a gold torc dating from the Iron Age.

A torc is a high status neck ornament which was worn by both males and females during the Iron Age. The most famous examples of this ornament come from the Snettisham Hoard in Norfolk which was first uncovered in 1948.

The torc, weighing 1.5 lbs, was examined by experts at the British Museum and is estimated to be worth in the region of £100, 000. This is the only known example of this type of artefact from Nottinghamshire and as such is a major find for the county. It is also comparable to the examples discovered at Snettisham. A team from Nottinghamshire County Council will assess the archaeological context of the torc later in the year.

Castles Project Update

The Nottinghamshire Castles Project has been running for almost 18 months now, and work at several sites has come to fruition.

The geophysical results from Annesley, Clipstone and Worksop have all been processed and analysed.

The condition survey of the stone fabric at King John's Palace continues.

The East Bridgford Local History Group have been awarded a Local heritage Initiative grant to investigate Pancake Hill motte and bailey. Work is scheduled to begin in the Autumn of 2005 and will involve tree felling, scrub clearance, a geophysical survey, fieldwalking and earthwork survey. The work is being run by the Local History Group and advised by Nottinghamshire County Council and the Sherwood Initiative. Volunteer priority will be given to the village group; however there will be some occasions when Sherwood Initiative volunteers will have the opportunity to get involved.

Castles Conference

Ursilla Spence (Nottinghamshire County Council) and James Wright (Sherwood Initiative) made several presentations at Nottingham University on the work of the project at the Nottinghamshire Castles Conference on Saturday 12th March.

The conference was well attended by just over 100 people representing academic groups, local history societies and the general public. Other speakers at the conference included Dr Sarah Speight from the East Midlands Earthwork Project, Dr Pamela Marshall the Chair of the Castle studies Group, and Peter Masters of Pre-Construct Geophysics.

Were you at the conference? Send us your comments!

Wanted!

Herbalist

Someone with a good knowledge of historic medicine (mediaeval or any other period) who would be interested in demonstrating their skills at one of the archaeology events.

Textiles Specialist

We're looking for someone who can weave or spin (or both), and preferably has the associated equipment. We're looking for someone who would be interested in coming to demonstrate their skills at one of the archaeology events.

King John - Local Lad

Did you know that King John was a local lad? Here are a few facts we thought you might find interesting.

King John is the notorious king from the Robin Hood legends. He owned lots of land in Nottinghamshire and not a lot elsewhere. He lost the Crown Jewels in The Wash and was besieged in Nottingham Castle in 1194, and surrendered. King John's Palace was named after him, despite him having only stayed there for 9 nights. He was forced to sign the Magna Carta in 1215 in an attempt to curb his power, and died in 1216 after eating dodgy Lampreys at Newark Castle.

Robinson's Mills

When Arkwright went to Derbyshire to make use of the powerful rivers in his mills a friend of his, George Robinson, stayed in Nottinghamshire and decided to try to make the most of county's comparatively poor rivers. He acquired some land along the River Leen in Papplewick, and in 1778 set about the construction of a new mill and an ingenious system of ponds and leets.

The aim of the system was to store water in a series of ponds. This water was directed to flow through a mill and then be fed into another storage pond. In this way there would be continuous power and water pressure to meet demand.



The system became a family concern, run by three generations of the Robinson family in all. In 1816 an inspecting magistrate commended the family on the working conditions within the mills. By the 1820's however, James Robinson, grandson of George, was tiring of the business and gradually sold off all the mills. The system went into decline, and catastrophe struck in 1838 when Forge Mill, one of the largest in the system, was completely gutted by fire.

Over the years some of the ponds have drained and the leets have become overgrown with brambles, but any walker with a keen eye will notice that not all is as it seems when strolling past Moor Pond. A good deal of the system remains intact, including some of the original sluice gates. The Moor Pond Wood Society is currently involved in a project to investigate the system and uncover some of the lost sections, as well as providing interpretation boards for visitors and locals alike.

Letters

Any questions or comments? Is there anything archaeological or about your local area that you always wanted to know? Write to us!

(Address below)



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