

# HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## 2013 WORKSHOPS AND EXCURSIONS

With grateful thanks to Philip Saunders and Ashley Mather who organised the workshops and excursions, some Society members were able to enjoy the days of summer sunshine and take part in our programme of activities. This year we added in some extra events to provide more interesting daytime workshops during the darker winter months to supplement our usual monthly evening lectures.

### **A14 SMALL FINDS WORKSHOP**

In February, we were fortunate to invite a team from the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) to the Methodist Church to get 'hands on' with some of the small finds from the excavations along the route of the upgraded section of the A14. After a short talk, when the team outlined the archaeological excavations along the route of the A14 and put into context some of the impressive discoveries, including finding a lost village, prehistoric enclosures, roundhouses, and the large number of Roman farmsteads and artifacts, we broke into smaller groups to explore some of the many coins, broaches and other small artifacts that had been found.

### **HUNTINGDON ARCHIVES – MANORIAL, ENCLOSURE AND ESTATE MAPS WORKSHOP**

March we finally managed to rearrange the visit to the Huntingdonshire Archives, postponed in January due to illness, to look at some of the Manorial, Estate and Enclosure maps and documents of the land surrounding Huntingdon. These old records contain a wealth of information, not just the layout of roads and villages, but field names and layouts, owners and tenants, crop rotations, fees and incomes.

### **EVENING STROLL AROUND NEEDINGWORTH**

The Summer programme started with an evening guided walk on the 7<sup>th</sup> June along Church Street, Needingworth, led by Peter Cooper, local resident and historian. Peter has carried out extensive research into the layout and architecture of the village, pre and post the great fire in 1847, and created website with an interactive map containing information and documents about the village, houses and its residents. ([www.hcnhistory.org.uk](http://www.hcnhistory.org.uk)). His latest addition has been to include a number past residents wills linked to the houses on the map.

### **DIDDINGTON AND GREAT PAXTON CHURCHES**

The 28<sup>th</sup> Jun we explored two of the often forgotten local medieval churches; St Laurence in Diddington and Holy Trinity in Gt Paxton.

## DIDDINGTON - Church of St Laurence.

Diddington is a small village with just a few houses, is just south of Buckden on the A1. Listed in the Domesday Book, the parish once formed a part of the Honour of Huntingdon, and has passed through the control of many families, finally in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century coming under the control of the Thornhill family, who still own the land today. There



have been three manors but sadly none have survived, except just a few buildings such as the stable block. In 1939 the Government requisitioned some of the land becoming a transit camp for Czech troops, a prisoner of war camp and latterly the American 2<sup>nd</sup> Evacuation Hospital, a 750 bed unit providing care and recuperation for injured members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The hospital remained until the end of WWII until the site was converted into a Polish resettlement camp from 1946 to 1954. The work of the Polish Services are commemorated by a plaque in the grounds of St Laurence's Church.



There has been a church on the site since the late Anglo Saxon period. The church is listed in the Domesday Book when it was under the control of the Bishop of Lincoln. Like most of our old churches, the structure was constantly

being changed. The North aisle was added in 1275, South Chapel built by the Taylord family in 1500's and dedicated to his daughter.

The Thornhill

family built the tower and added the Vestry in 1865. The South Chapel houses the Thornhill family monuments and Hatchments. The Church is dedicated to St Laurence of Rome, said to be the patron of the poor.





Inside the church is a modern plaque dedicated to the soldiers and airmen of the five RAF Stations close by, RAF Little Staughton, 109 and 582 Squadrons, RAF Graveley, 35 and 692 Squadrons, RAF Tempsford Special Operations Squadrons, RFAF Kimbolton, USA 8<sup>th</sup> Airforce, and RAF Gransden, 405 Squadron Royal Canadian Air Force.

### **GREAT PAXTON - Holy Trinity Church.**

An Anglo Saxon minster church, grandiose, cruciform and a great treasure hidden away behind the main street. Built during the reign of King Canute in approximately 1020, it would have been a 'Minster' with several clergy and a head priest.



There are no records why the church was constructed in stone and 'clunch' when the majority of churches were still being constructed in wood. At the time of construction large quantities of lime mortar would have been required so it would have been likely there would have been a lime kiln somewhere on, or close, to the site. The original Saxon Church is at the centre of the current building and was believed to have been thatched. An excavation by members of this Society in 1973 revealed remains of 11<sup>th</sup> Century walls and pillars of what was possibly the northern wall of the North transept. (Records of Huntingdonshire 1977, Vol1 Part 8). The Nave was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Chancel rebuilt late 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Porch and Tower in the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Aisles rebuilt in late 15<sup>th</sup> Century and supporting buttresses added to the Chancel in 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The first bells were installed in the bell tower in about 1400. Sadly, due to deterioration, all but one of the bells has been recast. In 2018 the bells were removed and the refurbished, the headstocks and some frames replaced. The headstocks now carry the names of the major financial sponsors and the bell ringers. Some of the group were able to climb the bell tower, see the room of graffiti and see the refurbished bells and frames.



In the church grounds are two monuments to RAF airmen lost during WWII. We paid respects



to Pilot Officer Cardell, local boy, killed in the Battle of Britain. There is also a memorial in dedication of the crew of a Lancaster bomber that crashed in the village on Christmas Eve 1944.

After our guided tour of the church and grounds we were provided with splendid tea and cakes to help us on our way home.



## **GRANTHAM CANAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July, a beautiful sunny day, 16 of us ventured north to visit the Grantham Canal Society to learn about an important piece of Lincolnshire's Industrial heritage. We were met by Rosemary



Gibson, wearing traditional costume, Tony Osbond and a number of other members and treated to a marvellous spread of cakes, biscuits, tea and coffee to start the day. Rosemary told us about the history of the canal, why it was built to transport goods such as coal that had to be transported overland in large carts, rather than compete with the stagecoach companies, and Tony explained the history of the Society and its plans for

the future.



Very briefly, the 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland realised the opportunity brought by a canal between Nottingham and Grantham would enable cheap fuel, coal, to his castle and surrounding villages so he actively supported the venture. Sadly the Duke died in 1787 before any decision was taken but his Estate Manager and son John, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland continued to support the idea. They managed to persuade local aristocracy and wealthy farmers to fund a survey of a possible route. Despite a few setbacks the Grantham to Nottingham Canal Bill was passed in Parliament in 1793. The same year they raised sufficient funds to start the construction work and the canal opened for use in 1797. The canal is 33.25 miles long, has 18 locks and 70 bridges and to be constructed in such a short period is remarkable. ***(Imagine doing this in today's society, it would be impossible to get to the first consultation in the same period!)*** During the early period the canal encountered a few problems, needing extensive repairs and reconstruction. The canal had its hay days from 1815 – 1851 when it played a major role in the development of Grantham. However, the opening of the Nottingham to Grantham railway in 1851 and the take-over of the canal by the railway started the decline and an Act of Parliament in 1936 closed the canal. In 1968 the canal was categorised as a 'remainder' waterway with no economic future and was destined to be filled in, as happened in Nottingham, but the remaining sections to Grantham were designated for use as agricultural irrigation. In 1969 a group of enthusiasts with the support of the Grantham Civic Trust, Grantham Angling Association, Inland Waterways Association and local MP, formed the Grantham Canal Society with the aim of restoring the canal. The Society has been able to rebuild a number of locks, replace the gates, repair bridges and open the canal between Woolsthorpe Lock and the A1.



After an excellent morning exploring the history of the canal, we all retired to the lounge of 'The Dirty Duck' pub for a well-earned lunch before splitting into two parties for a short ride in the Society's own narrow boat to experience the delights of the Vale of Belvoir. To make our journey even more pleasant the Society provide excellent drinks and snacks as we meandered along the waterway following a swan family on their afternoon outing.





### **NORTHBOROUGH – St Andrews Church, Manor and Walk in the Village**

In the afternoon of Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August we visited the village of Northborough, the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Church of St Andrew and the grounds of Northborough Castle (Manor). Ashley met us all at the church



and introduced Clare Strack the Secretary of the PCC and a team of enthusiastic volunteers who showed us around the church and grounds. The Church is a Grade 1 listed building, the nave built in late 12<sup>th</sup> Century and at the West end is a gabled bellcote housing two small bells, there is no bell tower. The large south chantry chapel was built by G Delamore in about 1350, and underneath there is a charnel house with many disarticulated bones. Inside the chapel are monuments to the Claypole family, in particular James Claypole, the owners of Northborough Manor/Castle.

There is also a small plaque to Elizabeth Cromwell, wife of Oliver Cromwell, who is buried below the chapel. Her daughter, also named Elizabeth, married John Claypole, and after the death of Oliver, Elizabeth moved to Northborough Manor, living with her daughter Elizabeth and her husband, until she died in November 1665.





After our tour of the church and grounds we all sat down to excellent tea/coffee and selection of delightful cakes, all provided by the ladies of the PCC, before heading outside for a short guided walk along Church Street to explore some of the many listed buildings. Our first stop was at the West end to view the courtyard of Northborough Manor, built about 1340 by Roger de Northburgh, Bishop of Lichfield. We were fortunate to have been given permission by the current owners to



allow our party to enter the courtyard to view the house and surrounding buildings. The Manor, also



known as the Castle, is a superb example of a fortified house and is a rare example of a medieval domestic building. You enter the courtyard through a large separate gatehouse that stands opposite to the house. The house was sold to James Claypole in 1565 and remained in the family till 1681. Oliver Cromwell and his family are known to have stayed in the house on many occasions, and their daughter Elizabeth

married John Claypole.

As we walked down Church Street we stopped outside a number of the 29 listed houses but one in particular, a quaint unassuming cottage, which was the home of John Clare, notable 19<sup>th</sup> Century poet. The cottage had been purchased by his friends and patrons in 1832 after Clare became unsettled in a smaller cottage that had been presented to Clare by Earl Fitzwilliam, of the Manor. Sadly Clare, who would now be identified as a manic depressive, was committed to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum in 1841. His maintenance at the Asylum was paid for by Earl Fitzwilliam, Clare sadly died of a stroke on 20 May 1864.

Our visit to Northborough was completed with a guided tour of the ground floor of Church Farmhouse, the private home of our main guide for the day.

**Lincoln – 2<sup>nd</sup> September.** Our final excursion, a guided tour of Lincoln Cathedral, led by Dr Lynne Broughton, that was arranged jointly with the Cambridge Historic Churches Trust and Cambridge Association for Local History.