

FRIENDS OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ARCHIVES (FONA)  
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# NEWSLETTER

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*A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR TO  
ALL OUR MEMBERS!*

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*A small group of Friends attended our event at East Leake on 26 September 2013 at which they heard Keith Hodgkinson, pictured above holding a copy of his recent book on John Bley (front row, right), speak about the life and times of this fascinating man.*

# STAFF CHANGES AT THE ARCHIVES

*It has been a time of fond farewells at the Archives. Mark Dorrington left the office in November 2013 to take up the position of Keeper of Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham recently vacated by the retirement of Dr Dorothy Johnston. Chris Weir retired from the Archives Office at Christmas 2013. Below, Chris looks back on some of the highlights of his career.*



***Chris Weir in his office (containing everything from paperwork to Hobnobs!)***

My interest in Archives really began with reading local history books and walking in the local countryside. I have always been interested in history, but especially local history. I remember being inspired by W.G. Hoskins. His 'Making of the English Landscape' revealed to me a whole new world of fields and farms, deserted mediaeval villages, hedgerow boundaries, enclosure patterns, place names and old maps. It was a world that was on the 'doorstep'. It didn't even mean a 30 mile hike through the mountains. It was all there on a stroll around Laxton, through the

Leicestershire byways or cycling past Nottinghamshire's fields and farms. Then I read W.E. Tate's 'The Parish Chest' and began to discover the delights of overseers' accounts, vestry minutes, parish registers and other parish records that brought local communities to life. It led me into a life-long interest in archives and what they can tell us about landscapes and people.

For more than 40 years, I have been lucky enough to have worked in Archives. My first post was as a 'Miscellaneous Records Clerk' with Nottingham City Archives. The Archives service was on South Sherwood Street in the basement of the old Central Library. From those days, I especially remember Stephen Best who worked in the City Library. He had a wonderful sense of humour and an amazing knowledge of Nottingham's history. One of my jobs in those days was to sort out and box-up thousands of City building control plans. I had to wear a 'boiler suit' and dust mask and did most of the work in one of the cells underneath the Guildhall. The search area for the Archives was in the basement of the Library. Occasionally, Keith Train would pop in to do research for one of his Thoroton articles or research for a lecture, and Dick Iliffe & Wilf Baguley used to visit to find material for their 'Victorian Nottingham' books.

In those days, I used to do the copying. Initially, I did this on an old Roneo machine and, since then, I have seen the rise of the 'modern' photocopier, the use of roll microfilm, the introduction of microfiche and the appearance of computers both for office and personal use. The quill pen, though, still remains a feature of the Archives for workshops, events and school sessions!

In 1976, I and Freda Wilkins-Jones, the Nottingham City Archivist, transferred to the County Records Office, as it was then titled, on High Pavement. I and Jack Cupit were the

two records assistants. We were up and down stairs all day getting out and returning archives into the basement storage areas. On High Pavement, the service grew to meet the demands of the growing interest in local and family history. At its height, visitor numbers grew to 17000 a year. Though the old judge's lodgings was a fine building, the space for storage became critical. After some years searching for premises to re-house the service, it was eventually agreed that we would move into an entirely new building. This happened in 1993, when the service moved into purpose-built premises on Castle Meadow Road, Nottingham. Adrian Henstock was the County Archivist.

One of my key roles in the Archives service has been to develop outreach work. In the 1980s, I introduced a series of resource packs for schools. The first title was 'The Victorian School'. One of the packs, 'Rufford: From Abbey to Country House' won the Phillimore prize for the best archive educational resource in the UK. Group visits, tours and a programme of workshops began to attract a wide range of visitors and a popular series of lunchtime talks has run over many years and provided insights into everything from allotment gardens and heraldry to 'Gossip & Scandal' in Georgian Nottingham!

At this period, I became a local history tutor for the University Adult Education Department and WEA. My first class was at Lambley where, after 3 years, the group produced 'Lambley: A Village Study'. At the end of the 3 years, the class formed a local history society that still flourishes today. I was elected President of the Society many years ago and still attend as many meetings and events as possible. I did classes at many other locations, including Lowdham, Gedling at Arnold, some of which again led to the production of publications.

My first book was 'Village & Town Bands' published by Shire. At around that time, Philip Lyth, President of the Local History Council (now the Local History Association), encouraged me to submit a manuscript on

the Nottinghamshire countryside to the Association for publication. This became 'A Prospect of Nottinghamshire' (1986) and, with his support, it was taken on by the County Council and became a published book. The foreword was by Myles Thoroton Hildyard. Philip and I visited Flintham Hall to discuss the foreword with Myles. This proved a daunting occasion and I was immediately in Myles' bad books when I parked my car in front of the Hall instead of round the back!

For Nottinghamshire Archives, I researched and wrote 'Women's History in The Nottinghamshire Archives, 1550-1950' that became a pioneer work and has been used as a key resource for women's history resource since its publication in 1989.

Over the years, I have written a number of commercial books, including 'Bygone Nottingham', 'Nottingham: A History' and 'The Nottinghamshire Heritage' (all published by Phillimore); 'Jesse Boot of Nottingham' (for the Boots Company); 'Wilkinson: The Story of The People's Store, 1930-2005' (for Wilkinson Company); 'Village & Town Bands' (Shire Publications) and 'As Poor As A Stockinger' (Nottinghamshire County Council). I am currently working on a publication, with a colleague, for the County Council in the 'Turning Back The Pages' series on 'Nottinghamshire & World War 1'.

I have done countless appearances on local radio to promote events, publications and exhibitions. I remember on one occasion, a phone-in connected with an event called 'Ghost Night', the presenter asking the caller what the sloshing sound was in the background (it was mid-afternoon). The gentlemen replied that he was having a bath as he always did at that time in the afternoon. The caller wanted to complain that a ghost kept moving his cigarettes around the house and he could never find them! To promote some open days and to help with historical workshops, I occasionally dressed as a Victorian gamekeeper. I was accompanied by 'Bob the Ferret' (a cloth creation with button-

eyes), a rat trap and Roland Rat. 'Bob' had a variety of accessories, including his all-important mobile phone!

At national level, I have given lectures and workshops on outreach and marketing at conferences around the UK and I wrote the module for 'outreach and marketing' for the Archives Administration postgraduate external diploma and was examiner for the course. Among my professional articles was 'Selling Yourself: Outreach & Promotion in the Nottinghamshire Archives Office' that was published in the 'Journal of the Society of Archivists' in 1991. In 1997, I chaired the Society of Archivists' Anniversary Working Party that organised a series of events, lectures and activities throughout the country to highlight the work of the Archives profession and the value of our archival heritage.

In recent years, I have become interested in community history and in working to create opportunities for young people to engage with archives and local history. I have organised two heritage competitions for young people and two youth heritage conferences, one at Lakeside (University of Nottingham) and last year's at Shire Hall. The next youth conference will be at Wollaton hall in July 2014. In 2011-12, I worked with a group of young people on an Olympiad Journals Project to explore Nottingham's Parks & Gardens. I accompanied some of the young people to London when they were invited to show their work to Lady Walmsley at the House of Lords. This project won the 2012 Nottinghamshire Heritage Award for 'Work with Children & Young People'. I also secured, for Nottinghamshire Archives, a Heritage Lottery grant to fund a project for 17 young people to preserve a major collection of information on First World War memorials (the Wakefield Collection) that will become available next year. I am also on the steering group of the Hyson Green 'Belong' project that is working with local young people to explore the life and times of George Africanus, Nottingham's first black

businessman. This project also involves leading workshops and trails.

I retire from the Archives at the end of December and will become a freelance Heritage Consultant. I will look forward to supporting the Archives service and its development into the future. I am also now vice-chairman of the Nottinghamshire Local History Association and will again look forward to exploring links between archives and the world of community and local history.

## MEETING OUR NEW 'COUNTY ARCHIVIST'

*Peter Gaw, Group Manager, Libraries, Archives, Information and Learning, Nottinghamshire County Council, issued the following statement in January 2014:*

'Following a national recruitment process, I am delighted to inform you that **Ruth Imeson** has been appointed to the post of **Team Manager, Archives and Local Studies** at Nottinghamshire County Council and has now taken up post. Ruth was formerly Principal Archivist (Records Management) at Nottinghamshire Archives and previously worked in Oxfordshire.

Ruth takes on the leadership of the Archives, Records Management and Local Studies services at a time of great challenge, as we develop the archives office to provide better access, extended storage capacity and meet the new archives standard whilst responding to a very difficult financial situation for the County Council. I know, through various groups and forums, you will continue to support the service and I know Ruth will work with you to maintain the excellence we aim to achieve'.

*Friends had an early opportunity to hear from Ruth, as she was one of the speakers at our 'Heritage Meets the Future' event (16 November 2013), a report of which appears on the next page.*

## HERITAGE MEETS THE FUTURE



*FONA Chairman Richard Gaunt (centre) presents a membership card to Ruth Imeson and a membership leaflet to Tim Warner. Ruth and Tim were the speakers at 'Heritage Meets the Future' on 16 November 2013.*

Ruth Imeson illustrated how important digital technology now is to historians and archivists by revealing that some 154 million downloads had been made from The National Archives website in 2012 together with 890,000 downloads of podcasts (audio talks online). Ruth had led a project to turn Gertrude Savile's diary entries into the 18<sup>th</sup>-century equivalent of modern 'twitter' entries (see: <https://twitter.com/GertrudeSavile>). Twitter is a social media which utilises short messages or entries of no more than 140 characters. Gertrude's diary was tailor-made for adaptation to this format. Moreover, Gertrude was an interesting character herself who lived in an age with many modern parallels - financial crisis (the South Sea Bubble), bawdy theatre ('The Beggar's Opera'), public executions (at Tyburn) and problems with love and (for those in well-to-do situations) domestic servants.

Gertrude's diary was 'coded' for online navigation using the hashtag symbol (which is a way of indexing it and creating searchable links). The language of twitter is itself a notable development within the last few years - with concepts such as trending

and re-tweeting entering the vocabulary. Gertrude's diary has attracted a worldwide fan base expanding across North America (including the east coast and California), South Africa and even in Tehran, Iran. Some followers likened their own daily lives to problems which Gertrude experienced - so much so that some users described 'having a Gertrude Savile moment'!

Tim Warner discussed his role in co-ordinating the 'Our Nottinghamshire' website ([www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk](http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk)). This is a 'community history' website which allows users to add content, articles, photographs and notes of research, which can be responded to and developed by users. Established groups and societies with their own existing websites can still find use in the site, by way of publicising their activities and creating links beyond their local vicinity. Using materials supplied by Graham Crisp, Tim showed the 13 members present how accessible the site is, in terms of posting new material. The site is moderated by Tim and a group of colleagues (to ensure nothing inappropriate is placed online) but it is already developing its own identity and following. Members are encouraged to explore the site for themselves and to consider posting new material online!

## BY THE WAY...

Have you collected **your** FONA membership card yet? Unclaimed cards are available for collection at our meetings. You can use your card to claim membership benefits, including **10% off all Nottinghamshire County Council publications when purchased at Nottinghamshire Archives**. Present your card in person, at the time of purchase, to claim your discount.



## BRING A DOCUMENT TO TELL A STORY (PART 2)

*Our final round-up of stories from our latest 'Bring a Document' event, at which Friends tell us about a document illustrating a story, theme or research interest.*

**Christine Drew** talked about her Souvenir Booklet of the Children's Hospital Bazaar held in November 1901. She explained that she had been 'put off' history in her childhood, but in 1990 went to work at Forest House, which had been the Children's Hospital, and was given a note of the history of the building. She had lived near the building when she was young, and the continuity and connection started off her interest in local history.

The booklet is a microcosm of social history. It shows a connection between the Nottingham Enclosure Act and Forest House, which was bought by Lawrence Birkin c.1890 and stood empty for a decade. The Census of 1891 shows it without even a caretaker. Birkin gave Forest House for the Children's Hospital. It had different origins from most, which were set up by the medical profession - this one was set up from a religious perspective, with no medical involvement in the beginning when T.C. Hine's daughter Millicent pulled together the first committee.

The document gives some insight into how philanthropy and welfare was organised before the Welfare State. It shows how affluent and titled families in the county were involved in developing the hospital - self-made man Lawrence Birkin was knighted for his contribution. Photographs of titled ladies in their finery reflect a deferential society we have now lost, and lists of committee members show a clear divide between women fundraising whilst men managed - with no evidence of them working together.

**Dominic Johnson** brought a document which she said was not a true document in the sense of the word, but a photocopy of one dating

back to the reign of Henry V. She had enlarged the document from the National Archives several times, in order to help with the translation from Latin and the transcription of the content. Her work had resulted in a book about Grace Dieu Priory (Leics) which gives a fascinating insight into the priory's activities. This included raising piglets for sale and a swan being eaten by the nuns. Priory accounts were a clear record of things being bought, sold and eaten and were written chronologically, although any spaces were filled, e.g. 1417 included a bit from 1415.

Dominic described herself as a palaeography 'nut' and she is currently working on a letter of Cecily Neville's, signed under her Seal and written at Waltham on 8 May 1483, to Richard, Duke of York, when he was Regent to Edward V.

## TURF CUTTING CEREMONY FOR THE ARCHIVES EXTENSION

*Photos from the event on 15 October 2013:*

