

History Notes, Christmas Review

Rather than writing about a single topic, this end-of-year issue will preview a whole bunch of items that are in the pipeline.

Barby Hill Archaeological Project

We have had a very quiet start to the second year's work on Barby Hill – owing to the persistent rain, most of our survey area is now a muddy quagmire in which any kind of research work is impossible. Undeterred, however, we have moved forward with various background activities: these include cataloguing finds from last year's work, and comparing our finds with finds on nearby sites at Barby Pools Marina and the Rugby Crematorium development, to get a first idea of comparative dating for these various sites. Two more operators (one from Kilsby, one from Barby) have been trained to use the magnetometer, so we now have a full team of trained surveyors and operators – allowing us to speed up the work when the land eventually dries out again. Metal-detector surveys have also been extended into additional areas on and around the hill.

We have also widened the scope of our work, in two ways: firstly by making an input, in the form of technical comments, to other archaeological work already under way at Barby Pools and at the Crematorium site; and secondly, in hands-on archaeological fieldwork – some members of our group have been gaining practical experience, assisting with archaeology around the site of the Roman camp at Bannaventa (on the A5, near the Whilton crossroads).

I will write an article in the New Year to explain more about the various Iron Age and Roman sites in this area – such background is important, as none of these sites can be considered on its own, they all fit together to form an overall picture of life in those far-off times, and Barby Hill is just one of about a dozen prehistoric and Roman sites within 6 miles of Kilsby.

Dan Snow and Kilsby Tunnel

From one hill to another ... Barby Hill may have been relatively quiet, but the trains are still running deep beneath Kilsby Hill. That is why I received a phone call out of the blue, back in July, from a TV producer in BBC4 requesting local assistance for some filming with Dan Snow around Kilsby Tunnel's ventilation stacks.

Sure enough, a week later Dan Snow turned up in Kilsby, with a TV cameraman, a sound man

and a small production team, all squeezed into a people-carrier along with what looked like about half a ton of equipment. We spent a merry (and wind-blown) afternoon on top of the hill, with Dan doing a series of "takes" to camera while I focused on my own more humble task – keeping a large herd of increasingly inquisitive cows at bay and out of the line of vision. Dan Snow is an engaging young man, very easy to talk to and extremely interested in local history – he has a knack of presenting the subject so as to make it interesting to the listener.

The results of the filming – along with many other fascinating aspects of our railway system from all over the country – will be seen in a series of three 1-hour programmes on the history of Britain's railways, to be aired by BBC4 in the New Year (**xxxxxxxxxx dates/times to be added, waiting for BBC to tell me**). Make a diary date now, to watch part of Kilsby's history on TV.



Have I got Old News for You

In a recent article for the Kronickle I included some extracts from newspaper reports of the 1800s and early 1900s, relating to rail traffic through Kilsby Tunnel in bygone years. There is a mine of information in these old newspaper reports (which are archived in a searchable website on the Internet), and I have been fascinated to see the variety of information contained in them, about Kilsby, Barby, Daventry and other local places, going right back to the late 1700s.

With a little care, it is possible to trace specific details of our local society – for example, did you know that there was a boarding school for young ladies in Kilsby in the late 1700s? And did you think that Kilsby had only 3 pubs in 1900? – or that the Devon Ox pub was always called by that name? If so, then think again! And of course, there is a mass of detail about individual people, and their houses and land.

There is material here for a few short articles dealing with some of these subjects, drawing on the wealth of information contained in old newspaper reports; look out for these too in the coming year.

A Huge New Project

Following the recent death of Mrs Rose Invernizzi (née Cowley) her sons Jeremy and Robert generously offered me the opportunity to catalogue and explore the huge archive of documents belonging to the Cowley Estate. This is very large project, involving many hundreds of old documents – there have been Cowleys in Kilsby since the 1400s – and I believe it will eventually shed a great deal of light on the history of Kilsby during the 1700s, 1800s and early 1900s. There are title deeds, wills and inventories, letters and correspondence, statutory declarations, copies of Kilsby court rolls (the original manorial court rolls were lost in the 1800s, so these copies of court roll extracts are a real find), and much more. Some documents are dated as far back as the early 1600s, and contain information about land and property in Kilsby and Barby. From what I have already seen, it is clear that we will eventually be able to produce a much clearer picture of both Kilsby's and Barby's histories over the last 300 years than I ever thought would be possible.



This is a rare privilege, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jeremy and Robert Invernizzi in public for their kindness and generosity in making this treasure trove of historic documents available for cataloguing and examination.

New Work on House Histories

The Cowley Archive contains an enormous amount of data about individual houses within the village – some of which are still standing and others that were pulled down 100 years ago or more. There is information relating to the George Inn (both the present brick building and the earlier stone building that preceded it), the George Cottages, Danetre House, Iliff's House, the Mount Pleasant cottages, and at least a dozen other cottages in the village. There is also a mass of detail about the ownership of land – and I have already seen some information that gives clues to the format and layout of some parts of the original medieval manor as it would have been in the 1200s and 1300s.

In addition to the Cowley estate papers for Kilsby, we already have copies of documents relating to the Cowley estate in Crick (another huge exercise is being carried out to collect and archive old title deeds for about 40 old houses in Crick, and to build up histories for as many of the houses as possible). The documents for the Cowley estates

in these two villages will combine to form an important archive that will provide material for many years of research.

And finally ... the work already completed over the last 10 years or so on house histories in both Crick and Kilsby (plus a few houses in Barby, Braunston and Long Buckby) has provided the basis for a new extension to the West Northamptonshire Local History website (www.westnorthantshistory.co.uk). Through a user-friendly map-based interface, it will soon be possible to explore house histories for our local villages via the Internet, and some trial pages are already in place for you to explore; they can be found on the "Regional" section of the website, and this will be expanded gradually during 2013.

Gren Hatton,
November 2012