

## NEWSLETTER



# MORE ANCIENT LATHOM SETTLEMENTS DISCOVERED BY TRUST MEMBERS



Stonemason Ken Hughes who has played a major role in refurbishing the West Wing demonstrates his craft to members and visitors during the Lathom Heritage Festival



Ongoing excavations and field surveys by our Archaeologists and members

Our Archive and Field Survey Groups show we've just scratched the surface



Local Heritage *initiative*

Two years of intense work by our Archive Research members and the Vernacular Building Survey team has thrown up a mass of new evidence on Lathom's heritage. The Deer Park Boundary survey has escalated far beyond imagination as previously unseen documents have come to light, demonstrating an even greater influence of Lathom's role in English history.

This coupled with further discoveries at the Ironage / Roman site and possibly three new Pre and Medieval settlements in Lathom, has fuelled a determination to move quickly to the next important stages of the project.

Final reports are still being compiled by our archaeologists Jamie Quartermaine, Steve Baldwin and Nigel Neil and the findings will be presented at the Lathom Heritage Festival in September.

A fifty page colour booklet, designed for general appeal, summarising the various discoveries is also well under way and further grant applications are being prepared to explore the wealth of fresh leads.

In the meantime Ron Cowell, Curator of Prehistoric Archaeology at Liverpool Museum, is planning more excavations at the Ironage site in Lathom during September and would like the help of Trust members.

Full details will be available nearer the time, but anyone interested in participating should let us know immediately.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S LATHOM YEARS EXPERT THROWS MORE LIGHT ON SHAKESPEARE'S 'LOST YEARS'



Bard's early plays written here in Lathom ?

Shakespearean scholar and author, John Idris Jones presented his 'Lancashire Theory' of 'Shakespeare's 'Lost Years' to a packed Lathom Park Trust audience in April.

Information now forthcoming strongly indicates that the majority of William Shakespeare's 'lost years' between 1579 and 1592 were spent here in Lathom, possibly as tutor to the family's children at Lathom House.

Whilst he may have had occasional forays to outlying venues such as Rufford and the Houghtons of Lea (now much publicised) Shakespeare's principal home for many years was in Lathom.

Here two of his plays, 'Edmund Ironside' and 'Edward III' could have been written and some parts of other early works '1,2,3 Henry VI' 'Richard III' and 'Titus Andronicus' may also have been first drafted at Lathom.

More information will be covered in our booklet for release in September including the fascinating details of Lathom's two month Festival of Plays in 1587.



## NEW OFFICERS FOR TRUST

Good news - Following our appeal in the last Newsletter, when we emphasised the need for the Trust to have an appropriate administrative structure to cope with increasing workloads. Trustee, Mark Hill has taken up the position of Company Treasurer; Barbara Fulton has become Membership Secretary and Pam Nanson, as well as her role as Trustee has been elected Chairman of the Social Events Committee, with Jenny Coombes Secretary and Janet Pope Treasurer. Our thanks go to their predecessors Mark Fletcher, Ailsa Bennett and Jenny Rushton respectively for their great contributions and to Janet and Jenny for their continuing work. More good news, we welcome back to the driving seat LPT Chairman, David Dunn following his recent illness.

Barbara Fulton



## Warm Rode Hall welcome for Lathom visitors

The first of a series of historical tours took place in May at the invitation of Sir Richard and Lady Anne Baker-Wilbraham to their beautiful home, Rode Hall in Cheshire. Two visits were arranged by Jenny Coombes and the Social Events Committee, which were enjoyed by nearly ninety of our members and friends. Sir Richard explained the strong historical links with the Lathom families and showed many examples of Lathom artefacts, paintings and photographs during the guided tour of the Hall. The grounds with their landscaped planting and water features were an absolute joy and the immaculately restored Oice house and walled garden were a revelation to many. We extend our sincere thanks to Sir Richard and Lady Anne for their generous hospitality.

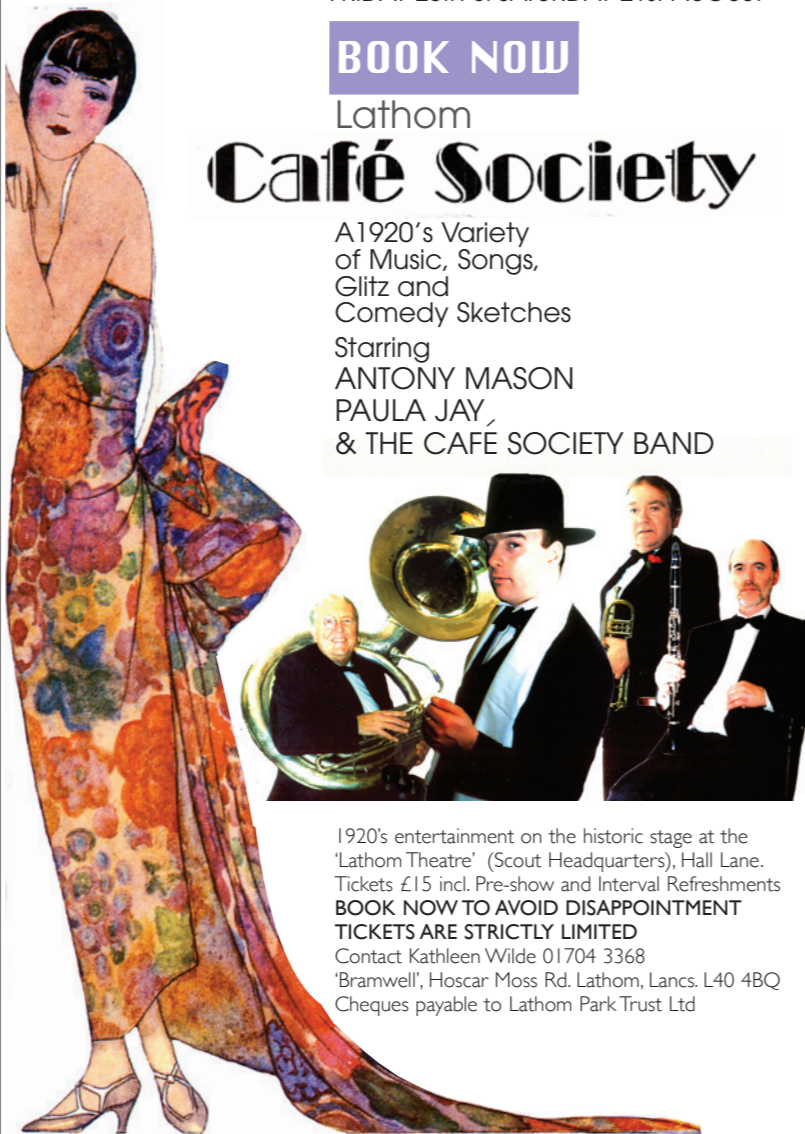
LATHOM PARK TRUST PROUDLY PRESENT - FOR TWO NIGHTS ONLY  
FRIDAY 20th & SATURDAY 21st AUGUST

**BOOK NOW**

## Lathom Café Society

A 1920's Variety  
of Music, Songs,  
Glitz and  
Comedy Sketches

Starring  
**ANTONY MASON**  
**PAULA JAY,**  
**& THE CAFÉ SOCIETY BAND**



1920's entertainment on the historic stage at the 'Lathom Theatre' (Scout Headquarters), Hall Lane. Tickets £15 incl. Pre-show and Interval Refreshments **BOOK NOW TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT** **TICKETS ARE STRICTLY LIMITED** Contact Kathleen Wilde 01704 3368 'Bramwell', Hoscarr Moss Rd. Lathom, Lancs. L40 4BQ Cheques payable to Lathom Park Trust Ltd

## Another Lathom discovery

It emerged during the first visit that world famous landscape gardener, Humphrey Repton, had a major influence in the design and construction of the Rode Hall parklands. This suggested a strong possibility that, because of the Lathom connections, Repton may have had a role in designing the Lathom pleasure gardens, a subject previously shrouded in mystery. Shortly afterwards, by amazing coincidence, Sir Richard came across a Sotheby's, New York auction catalogue which included an item, Sir Humphrey Repton's 'Red Book'. A 'Red Book' is a record of notes, rough sketches, design and construction details compiled by Landscape Designers for and during specific commissions. Yes! - it was the Lathom House project and urgent enquiries were put in hand by the Lathom Park Trust prior to auction in June, even though the indications were that the asking price may be around £70,000. Still - we can always dream!!

# No longer a brooding, bleak, monochrome of neglect!

Fifty years ago when I first came to West Lancashire it seemed that I was just in time to capture the fading echoes of a legend. Lathom Park Chapel dating back to 1500 and lying three miles east of the market town of Ormskirk, was real enough. Its warm stone walls and richly decorated interior were obviously cherished. But dominating the skyline above it was the cupola of the crumbling West Wing of Lathom House, all that remained of an imposing Palladian mansion designed by the Italian architect, Giacomo Leoni. It was a brooding bleak monochrome of neglect in comparison with the chapel and its well-tended garden.

Over the years its presence haunted me and I learned that the Leoni building, completed in 1734, was actually the second Lathom House. Its predecessor was a medieval palace fortress, for decades the unofficial capital of the North, where the Earls of Derby held sway. History books tell how it was successfully defended in 1644 against Cromwell's forces by Charlotte, the seventh Countess, but the following year, in a second siege, most of it was destroyed.

A very different aristocracy was to take over the fertile acres of surrounding Lathom Park in the eighteenth century. Sir Thomas Bootle, who had represented Liverpool as a Tory MP, commissioned Leoni to design the house, and his descendants, the Bootle-Wilbraham family, were lords of the manor until the 1920s when the central structure of the stately home was demolished.

If early developments had been misted in antiquity, the Bootle-Wilbraham era was solid social history touched at the end with a bitter-sweet glamour.



1st Earl of Lathom

Edward Bootle-Wilbraham, the first Earl of Lathom, owed his title to Queen Victoria who also made him her Lord Chamberlain. He sported a long, distinguished beard, worked diligently at his state duties, but also made time to travel, cultivate orchids, shoot, look after his estate and build up a fine herd of shorthorn cattle.

The second Earl, Edward George, was just as interested in farming and country pursuits, and like his father had concern for his tenants. His health deteriorated after losing an eye while out on a shoot, and he died in 1910 at the age of 45.

The third and last Earl, Edward William, was at Eton when he succeeded to the title. In no way was he a chip off the old block. Like his mother, Wilma, daughter of the Earl of Radnor, he was most passionate about things artistic and theatrical. After serving with the Lancashire Hussars Yeomanry in the 1914-18 war - he had his 21st birthday with his men in the trenches - he made increasingly for the bright lights of London's theatreland.

Rich, handsome and generous, he drew to him a coterie of up and coming stars including Noel Coward, Gertrude Lawrence, Ivor Novello and Gladys Cooper. They often visited him at Blythe Hall, Lathom, the family dower house which he rebuilt at vast expense, neglecting Lathom House. The 'wild' parties and his hedonistic extravagance were the talk of the neighbourhood. In London he entertained at his home in Cumberland Place which had a music room to seat 150, a private cinema and a study furnished in tangerine velvet.

His lavish spending, together with general economic downturn and the damage caused to Lathom House by Army occupation in the First World War, resulted in the estate being sold for around £200,000.

Ned Lathom, as he was known to London's 'bright young things', died in 1930 from tuberculosis, the family fortune decimated. He was 35 years old and left no heir.

This was the saga that I found so intriguing and I looked forward to developments when in 1996 a planning condition for the restoration of the West Wing required an excavation of the site. Four years later the Lathom Park Trust was founded to safeguard and promote awareness of the special character and historical importance of the surviving Lathom estate.



Leoni's 1734 Lathom House (original West Wing circled)

That was the start of one of the most fascinating and important heritage projects in the UK. Not only did archaeologists discover that the huge medieval moat and central tower of the first Lathom House lay under the site of the Leoni mansion, but in the fields of Dutton's Farm only a mile or two away another team of archaeologists was following up the discovery of an Iron Age quern stone by farmer's son Phil Beesley while out walking his dogs.

To date their discoveries include the foundations of five Iron Age roundhouses, the first evidence of Roman settlement in West Lancashire, and artefacts covering the 5,000 year period from the Middle Stone Age to medieval times.

Referees advising the British Academy on the value of the project describe it as having "the potential to lift the veil on one of the most obscure areas of British archaeology" and "the breakthrough opportunity for which we have been waiting".



Siege of Lathom



Medieval Palace Fortress



Charlotte

A wealth of research into the Bootle-Wilbrahams, particularly the flamboyant Ned, came to light with a visit from John Knowles, secretary of the Noel Coward Society, who has gathered together letters, photographs, old theatre programmes and copies of Ned's published plays, for use in a biography.

"Not long ago Lord Lathom was a ghost character, so little was really known about him. Now it's all flowing in," he says - "Noel Coward brought dramatic style into the British theatre and Ned backed him and was part of his team".

So much interest and material was emerging from all directions that the Trust decided to set up specialist groups so that volunteers could help to discover more of Lathom's forgotten past. The response was immediate.

A Theatre Influences group came together, for the original Lathom House was a centre for travelling players and Shakespeare himself. The Earls of Derby had theatre in their veins as well as the Bootle-Wilbrahams who were never at a loss to produce their own entertainment. The group have produced two world premieres which echoed the concerts staged by Ned in a social club he provided for for his tenants - now the Ormskirk and District Scout headquarters. A third 1920's musical show is to be staged there in August.

Another group has unearthed information and old photographs which indicate the exact layout of the walled garden which provided fruit and flowers, herbs and salad stuffs for the household from its many glasshouses and beds. The immediate aim is to organise more detailed archaeological surveys.

The award of a Local Heritage Initiative grant of more than £20,000 meant that the Trust could fund a long-term historic landscape and village survey, one of the objectives of which is to determine the original and probably much wider boundaries of the medieval hunting park.

To this end trained volunteers have put hours of work into surveying old buildings in Lathom and doing archive research which Oxford Archaeology North are processing and analysing for publication. In addition to this volunteers have worked alongside students and archaeologists from Liverpool and Bradford Universities and Liverpool Museum, investigating the farm site where the Iron Age and Roman remains promise the discovery of much more. It has been described as an "archaeological honeypot". Current findings indicate a scale of historic evolution far beyond anyone's imagination.

What seemed to me fifty years ago to be mysterious and legendary has crystallised into exciting reality. And already there has been visible spin-off. The Trust's launching in September, 2000, started the warm resurgence of a sense of community throughout a sprawling agricultural parish (population under 1,000) which has no village centre, no post office, not even a shop.

The hard-working social committee has one big problem - the demand for tickets for events ranging from musical shows and skittle nights to strawberry teas and historical tours is overwhelming.

Madeleine Were



## Future Events

Tickets will be available for all events. Members are urged to book by ringing the respective telephone numbers as soon as possible to avoid disappointment

Pam Nanson, Chairman LPT Social Events Committee

**AUGUST** Friday 20th & Saturday 21st 7.30pm

**LATHOM CAFÉ SOCIETY** - A 1920's variety of entertainment Lathom Theatre' (Scout Headquarters), Hall Lane, Lathom  
Tickets £15 including pre-show and interval refreshments  
TELEPHONE 01704 893368 Kathleen Wilde

**SEPTEMBER** Friday 10th 7.30pm

**LATHOM'S HONEYPOT** - Ron Cowell's amazing prehistoric finds Lathom Chapel, Lathom Park, Hall Lane, Lathom  
Tickets £6 including light refreshments  
TELEPHONE 01704 893574 Jenny Rushton

**SEPTEMBER** Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th

**LATHOM HERITAGE FESTIVAL** - Something for all the family Pilkingtons Conference Centre, Hall Lane, Lathom  
Details to be announced  
TELEPHONE 01704 893083 Peter Ferguson

**OCTOBER** Saturday 23rd 7.30pm

**LATHOM PARK TRUST DINNER DANCE**  
Ormskirk Golf Club, Cranes Lane, Lathom  
Tickets £22.50 incl. 3 course dinner & The Lune Valley Vintage Jazz Band  
TELEPHONE 01704 894540 Janet D.

## MESSAGE FOR NEWBURGH MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Our initial Vernacular Building and Park Surveys have shown a wealth of structures and settlements in Newburgh - once part of the huge Lathom Park Estates - just waiting to be explored. Unfortunately this is far in excess of our capabilities, bearing in mind our commitment to the existing phase two Lathom project. We are keen to support the efforts of Rebecca Richardson and the Newburgh Parish Council to pursue the possibilities in greater depth. This can only seriously be considered if members and residents of Newburgh would be sufficiently interested and prepared to get fully involved. Lathom Park Trust archaeologists, Jamie Quartermaine of Oxford University (North) and Steve Baldwin will be pleased to arrange an early meeting with interested Newburgh residents. Please contact Rebecca Richardson on 01257 463942 if you would like us to take this further with you.

## Trust Groups Meet



- 1 Jenny Rushton, retiring Chairman of the Social Events Committee enjoying refreshments with Trustee, Mark Hill who has recently taken over the role of LPT Company Treasurer.
- 2 Archaeologist and Trustee, Steve Baldwin in discussion with volunteers from the Vernacular Building Survey Group who have experienced all sorts of weather conditions in their quest to complete their project.
- 3 Horticulturalist, John Hayton shows the latest findings and draft booklet to some members of the Walled Garden Group, Elizabeth Hayton, Madeleine Were and Shirley Landrum.
- 4 Friendly chat and light refreshments created an informal atmosphere for lively discussions on the respective group discoveries which will be presented at the Lathom Heritage Festival in September.



## The Lost Gardens of Lathom

Archaeologist Mark Fletcher and Horticulturalist John Hayton conducted a fascinating tour of the ancient Lathom House walled garden which in its time was one of the finest in the land. Many of the old structures and foundations remain, particularly the enclosing wall and skittle alley where staff enjoyed their tea breaks with a round of skittles. The LPT Walled Garden Group are hoping more surveys can be carried out in the future to highlight the importance of this 'Listed jewel'.

