

Newsletter

July 2025



This month's photo of the week is a lovely view of
Hazelrigg House on a recent glorious summers day!

- Photo by Alexander Howes -

Photo of the
month

Northampton
Carnival 2025

Talk report -
Northampton in
film

This month in
Northampton's
history! - July

Around the
county with Alex
and Benji

Speakers 2025

Northampton heritage transport day

I am sure that many of us are aware that last month, Northampton celebrated another successful and fun-filled carnival! For those of us who were unable to make it, I have it on very good authority that we missed out on 'a proper banger!'

Whilst every year has proven to be bigger, brighter, and more ambitious than the last, this year was something extra special. Chosen to mark the 350th anniversary of the Great Fire of Northampton, the 2025 carnival lit up the town with floats, costumes, and performances that 'interpret the natural forces'.

In addition to the great fire, this year's carnival celebrated its 20th Birthday since being reintroduced in 2005 after a nearly decade-long hiatus.



Whilst bicycles remained until the 1970s, by 1960 motorised vehicles became increasingly popular, which allowed for the introduction of ornate floats. Therefore, by the 1960s, the Carnival Parade was firmly established, with thousands of participants and spectators coming from the town and further afield to witness the fantastic costumes and floats. To achieve this, many of the town's social, youth, and cultural groups combined forces to put their unique stamp on the parade.



Before being reintroduced, the Northampton carnival can trace its history back to 1890 as the 'Bicyclists' Parade. A 'monster procession' accompanied the bicyclists was attended by 20,000 people who watched the parade make its way around the town until it disbanded at Franklin's Gardens.

By 1901, 'the Bicyclists' Parade became the Cycle Parade as bicycles became the principal means of transport. Children and adults were encouraged to enter competitions for the most spectacular and extravagant costumes.



Despite the carnival's popularity, by 1996 the festivities were forced to cease as funding dried up. Luckily, this proved to be a temporary halt as it returned in 2005 to the delight of many. Since then, Northampton's Carnival has gone from strength to strength. In 2012, Northampton Carnival was even awarded the prestigious Inspire Mark by the London 2012 Olympic Games, thus putting it in the same league as the Notting Hill Carnival!

Report by Alexander Howes

Talk report - Northampton Film Archive Trust

by Pete Austin

Last month, we were fortunate enough to welcome Pete Austin from the Northampton Film Archive Trust. Pete arrived at the Humphrey Rooms excited to show us a tiny selection of the trust's extensive collection. Whilst only three films were shown, they provided a great glimpse into Northampton's recent past.

Before we explore Northampton's past through film, it is important to first introduce the Northampton Film Archive Trust. The trust is a registered charity run entirely by volunteers dedicated to the preservation of cine film and equipment. The trust holds an archive of roughly 5,000 reels of film in various formats. The majority of these cover events and daily life from across Northamptonshire. Pete



A view of the bustling Market Square from the late 1940s.

During their visit, Pete presented us with a selection of three reels, all depicting different periods in the town's history. The first reel was an advertisement to promote the town as an ideal place for London commuters to settle. Dating from the mid-1960s, it was interesting to see how life had changed in the succeeding 50 years. One of the noticeable changes was the market square which was completely full of stalls selling a huge variety of goods. Another noticeable difference was the house prices. The film proudly claimed that a new resident could expect to pick up a two-bedroom home for £2,600 or a three-bedroom semi-detached house for as little as £3,000.

The second and third films were slightly shorter but no less interesting. Both gave different glimpses into the town's past. The second film was a newsreel



A view of Northampton's town centre from the mid-1960s.

was keen to point out that the oldest film in their collection dates from 1903!

It didn't take much convincing for Pete to travel to us from their base at Chester House. Whilst I am sure the promise of tea, coffee, and biscuits helped, this was because the trust believes that 'like books in a library that need to be read,' 'film is meant to be seen'. Therefore, when not hosting one of their regular viewings at Chester House, you can often catch Pete (or one of his fellow volunteers) travelling the county to show their reels to as many people as possible.



Northampton's Civil Defence Force racing to the location of a simulated nuclear incident.

filmed by the Northampton Cine Club in 1948. In addition to information on the club itself, the reel captured the expansion of the Chronicle and Echo offices in the town centre. To the amusement of the crowd, Pete pointed out the lack of safety measures taken by the workmen. Not only were there no high visibility vests in sight, but the only PPI issued to the workmen appeared to be the trusty flat cap and a seemingly endless supply of cigarettes.

The final film shown to us was different yet again. Whilst also taken from the 1960s, the film didn't depict daily life, but rather an exercise conducted by Northampton's Civil Defence force. The exercise simulated the Civil Defence Force's reaction to a nuclear strike on Northamptonshire. It was reassuring to see that even in the event of nuclear armageddon, there was enough time for tea and a slap-up breakfast! As we all know, no matter how bad the situation gets, everything can be overcome with enough tea.

The evening finished with an informal Q&A session. During this, Pete put out a plea to all smartphone users. Rather than just preserving film, the trust is now looking to record the county's history for future generations. This will be done through the collection of smartphone footage sent in by the public. In addition to special events such as the carnival, the trust is looking for recordings of daily life. So, if you find yourself shopping on St Giles St, or walking through a sleepy village, take a few moments to whip out your phone and record the scene before emailing it to the Northampton Film Archive Trust.

Overall, Pete's presentation was very interesting and entertaining. There is truly something special about witnessing the town's history through film rather than relying only on pictures. There is no doubt that the trust will be invited back as we are keen to see more of their massive collection.

Report by Alexander Howes.

This month in Northampton's history! - June

This month, over 500 years ago, a large and highly important battle was fought within sight of Northampton's town walls. On July 10th the Yorkist and Lancastrian armies fought for control of the country as part of the conflict we now call 'the Wars of the Roses'.

In the fields between Delapre Abbey and the village of Hardingstone, the Lancastrians constructed a fortified position bristling with cannons and seasoned archers. Facing them was a Yorkist host assembling along the London road. As the Yorkist made their way across the sodden fields towards the enemy fortifications, they were subjected to a brutal hail of arrows. Luckily, the Lancastrian guns remained silent due to the very wet weather.



The cannonball found on the battlefield. Thought to be the oldest fired cannonball in England.



Watching the battle unfold was a Papal Legate (and part-time Milanese spy) who excommunicated the Lancastrian soldiers before the assault. This crippled morale and sent Lancastrian soldiers running once word reached them that the Yorkists had entered the camp and captured their commander, King Henry VI.

The battle of Northampton ended in a decisive Yorkist victory with casualties in the thousands, after Lord Grey of Ruthin changed sides midway through the battle and let the Yorkists into the Lancastrian camp. After spending three days in the town, the king was led back to London to act as a puppet ruler. It was also the first battle for the eighteen-year-old Edward, Earl of March, who, within a year, would be proclaimed King Edward IV.

Events are being held at Delapre Abbey on July 6th to mark the event. For more information visit the Northampton Battlefields Society at: <https://northantsbattles.com/>.

Report by Alex Howes

Around the county with Alex and Benji - The birth of radar

Last month, Benji and I visited, not a village, but a rather steep hill in rural Northamptonshire. Nestled amongst the ancient hedge rows and the ridge and furrow which scar the landscape, is a modest inscribed stone. If one allowed curiosity to take over and pulled over for a closer look, they would discover that this stone marks the site of a technological breakthrough!



A close up of the main memorial. It provides a great synopsis of how this site was used during the experiment.

In response, significant funding was funnelled into the developing systems, strategies, and technologies capable of countering this threat. Out of the many strange ideas presented, none captured the government's imagination like a 'death ray' which could use directed energy to destroy airborne targets. The Air Ministry offered a £1,000 reward to anybody who could demonstrate a working prototype by killing a sheep at 100 yards using only pure energy.

Whilst a directed energy weapon never materialised, an equally as groundbreaking technology did! Arnold Wilkins and Robert W. Watt initially set out to disprove the feasibility of a 'death ray' but quickly discovered that the same energy could be used to detect aircraft rather than destroy them.

After proving the theory was viable, the Air Ministry granted funding for a propagation experiment. With the guarantee of funding, it was now time for Wilkins and Watt to find an ideal location for the experiment. The BBC's Empire Service antenna (located outside Daventry) was identified as the perfect location for these tests. Its height, power and the surrounding open countryside ensured it produced a suitably broad beam.

Wilkins planned to detect an aircraft flying across the antenna's axis (which would transmit a modulated carrier) whilst two parallel half-wave dipole antennas (aligned at right angles to the main beam) detected the signal reflected by the aircraft. The experiment took place on 26th



Expect to see very well preserved medieval ridge and furrow in the surrounding fields.

According to many, Northamptonshire is the county of shoes, and little more and is certainly not the birthplace of one of mankind's most consequential inventions. They would, however, be wrong. Whilst the shoe industry is something to be proud of, I would make the case that the first test of radar significantly trumps this!

To understand how Northamptonshire became a testbed for radar, one must understand the context. The First World War witnessed the emergence of a novel and terrifying technology which could bring the war to England itself, the strategic bomber. Whilst the impact of strategic bombing by zeppelins and later aircraft was negligible, the improving capabilities of strategic bombers concerned the government. This was especially true by 1920, as larger bombers capable of greater payloads and ranges began entering the service.



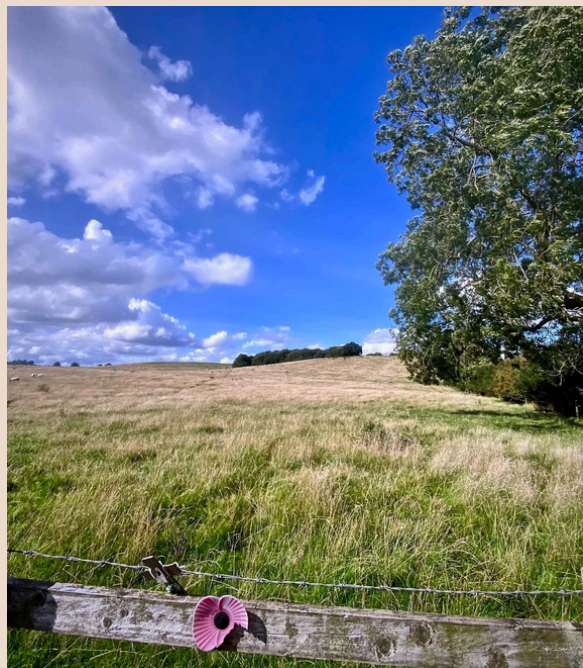
There is a sensibly sized lay-by next to the monument to make it as accessible as possible.

February 1935, and resulted in an RAF Heyford bomber (flown by Flight Lieutenant Blucke) making several passes over the agreed area. Wilkins detected 'rhythmic beatings' on the CRT screen as the aircraft flew overhead. Little did he know that this discovery would be crucial to British survival only five years later.

This successful test led to significant funding from the British Government, who used the funding to set up a team of full-time scientists working from Orford Ness to refine the concept. The concept quickly developed into an operational capability which would undeniably prove crucial to Britain's survival just five years later.



The summit of the hill provides great panoramic views of the unspoilt Northamptonshire countryside.



A view from the memorial stone looking towards the peak of the hill.

Thanks to the lack of development in the area, the site remains relatively unchanged, and one can walk to the top of the hill and look over the landscape which once aided the development of a groundbreaking technology which we now all take for granted. If you find yourself in the area, why not pull into the lay-by at the base of the hill, read the plaque, and set up a picnic on the hill's summit to enjoy those Middle England rural views and sounds?

Article by Alex Howes



Unfortunately the BBC Empire Service antenna is long gone but the rest of the surroundings remain relatively unchanged.



Speakers 2025

Humfrey Rooms
10 Castilian Terrace, Northampton NN1 1LD

Please arrive at 7:15 for a prompt 7:30 start so you have time to help yourself to tea and biscuits!
We kindly ask a for a suggested donation of £5 pp to cover the cost of renting the hall

March 17th

A history of St Peter's church

Jenny Rose and Gareth Lugar-
Mawson

St Peter's, Marefair is a designated Grade I listed building and, being a redundant parish church, has been under the care of the Churches Conservation since 1998. Considered by some to be the finest 12th Century church in Northamptonshire, this will be a talk covering most aspects of its evolution from earliest origins to present day.

In this spooky talk we explore the rich and mysterious ghosts, legends, and folklore of Northampton! Adrian, or as he is better known, the ghost detective, is the author of a series of books investigating Northamptonshire haunted locations. So who better to take us on a tour of Northampton's haunted past?

May 19th

Haunted Northampton
Adrian Perkins

June 16th

Film from 20th century
Northampton
Peter Austin

The Northamptonshire Film Archive Trust is a registered charity dedicated to collecting and preserving cine film and converting the footage into a digital format to screen to audiences around the county. Our visit to Northampton Civic Society will include scenes taken in and around Northampton in the 20th Century.

This month's talk will see us welcome our neighbours from Wellingborough Civic Society, who are offering a fascinating and thought-provoking talk on a major community asset: the Victoria Centre. Through an exploration of its history, we will begin to understand why a multi-cultural community centre is so important for the local community.

July 21st

The Story of the Victorian
Centre
Freud Edeltraud

August 18th

The Archaeology of
Northampton
Andy Chapman

From the Neolithic, he will move on to the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, with Hunsbury Hill providing the only surviving upstanding prehistoric earthwork. The Romans will get a brief mention before he explores the Anglo-Saxon origins of the town in some detail. He will finish with the rise, fall and eventual demolition of Northampton's royal Castle.

Poplars is a grand house built in 1778 by a wealthy widow, in a prime place at the top of a hill in Wellingborough. Mike's talk will take us to explore the people who called the 50-acre estate home. We will understand where they came from, what they did, where they went and what legacy they left behind. Like the Channel 4 series "A House through time", we will experience how the house adapted to social changes during its first 125 years.

September 15th

Poplars Grand House
Mike Williams



Keep your diary free for our next talk on July 21st!



Keep your diary free for our next talk on the evening of July 21st, when Freud Edeltraud will be visiting us from Wellingborough Civic Society!

Freud will be offering a fascinating and thought-provoking talk on a major community asset: the Victoria Centre.

Through an exploration of its relatively short, but storied history, Freud will present an excellent case for why a multi-cultural community centre is so important for the local community.

We hope to see you there. Please see the events list above or visit our website at the address below for further details. Also, please join our Facebook group for any updates.

Thank you for reading!

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