

Newsletter

Aug 2025



St Giles' church tower on another of our recent glorious summer days.

- Photo by Alexander Howes -

Photo of the
month

Talk report

This month in
Northampton's
history

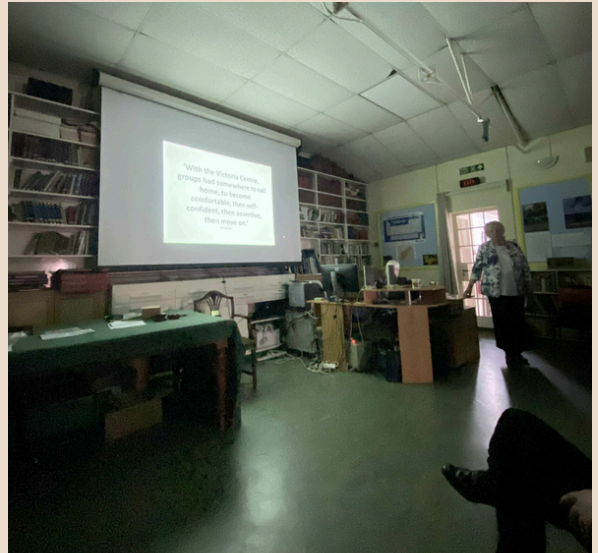
Around the
county with Alex
and Benji

Speakers 2025

Talk report - The Victoria Centre by Edeltraud Freund

This month, we were excited to welcome our friends and neighbours from Wellingborough Civic Society, who gave us a very interesting and thought-provoking talk on the Victoria Centre (VC). Through a brief exploration of the building's history and the experiences of its users, the talk aimed to prove why a multicultural community centre is a vital part of any modern community. It is safe to say that, by the end, the talk had certainly completed its objectives.

The building began its life in 1879 as the Victoria Congregational School and Sunday School (hence the name). However, it was during the Second World War that the story began to gain local notoriety. During the conflict, the VC became a billet for the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry and then a day centre for Black American soldiers from the 8th US



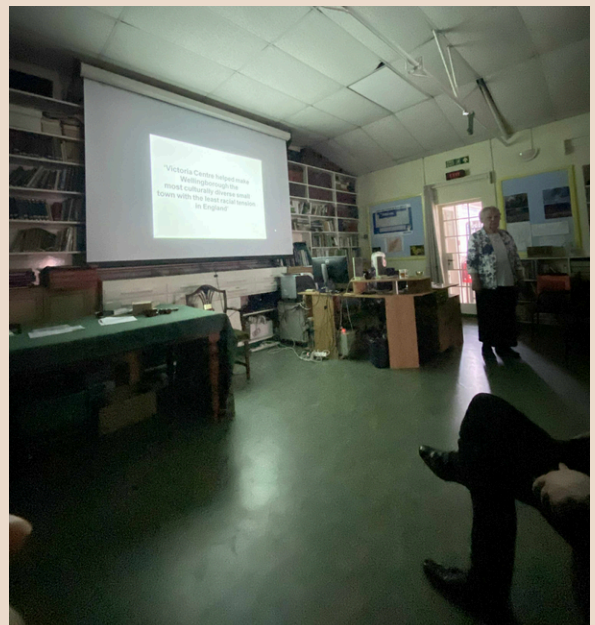
Army Air Force. In addition to period Newspaper articles reporting on the soldiers (including one about how these American soldiers saved several local schoolgirls), we have physical evidence of their presence. During renovation work, many artefacts have been found from regimental cap badges and uniform buttons, to 40s era items like cigarette boxes and food wrappers. Edeltraud even brought some of these fascinating relics in to show us!

By 1972, a very well-attended meeting was organised by Dr Brian Silk and his wife, Demiese, to 'address the social changes the influx of immigrants was bringing' It resulted in the establishment of a working party to 'investigate all



matters concerned with community relations in Wellingborough'. The working group found that the 'new arrivals' struggled to adapt to their new surroundings and increasingly felt isolated from their culture, communities, and even food. The group concluded that this was unacceptable and must be addressed.

Eventually, after many delays and struggles, the VC opened on the 6th of October 1979 and immediately began providing a safe place for the town's Asian, Black, and Caribbean communities. It provided an accessible space for these communities to practice and preserve their culture and identity. Since opening, the VC ran a popular arts program which provides a place for communities to practice and exhibit traditional dance, music, and literature.



In addition to supporting the arts, the VC plays a more practical role in helping new arrivals with everything from securing vouchers to filling out forms. By 2003, the VC established the 'Information Centre for New Arrivals' with a dedicated member of staff due to the service's demand. Additionally, Edeltraud explains that the VC provides support for domestic violence, schooling, and female genital mutilation. All these are issues which impact a large number of people across the country.

Finally, another important service offered by the VC is English Language classes aimed at women and mothers who don't get the opportunities to learn at home. Edeltraud explained that it isn't rare for young children to be asked to translate for their parents for everything from Parent-teacher meetings to personal medical appointments, as many places lack the facilities needed to provide a suitable service.

Throughout the talk, Edeltraud provided thought-provoking true stories which highlighted the struggles many of the VC's users have faced and how they are benefiting from the assistance and support the VC offers. It was certainly left in no doubt that the VC provides a much-needed service for a large number of the town's residents. Sadly, many people and families across the country continue to struggle with the issues discussed above, but don't have access to a safe and supportive place like the VC. Therefore, the VC's mission of assisting 'integration without losing your identity - not assimilation' is a highly important and admirable one, and one which should inspire other such organisations to be founded across the UK.

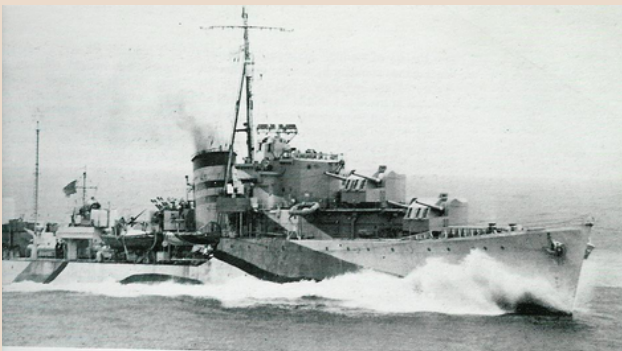
Thank you, Edeltraud and your team, for your fascinating and certainly thought-provoking talk on an amazing place doing amazing work. It is heart-warming to hear that there are places like this providing support and safety to a vital part of our modern community.

Report by Alexander Howes.

This month in Northampton's history! - August

Despite being as far away from the sea as we can get, Northampton had its own warship during the Second World War. HMS Laforey was commissioned on the 26th of August 1941; however, it wasn't till later that Northamptonshire adopted it after a successful 'Warship Week National Savings' campaign. HMS Laforey was a L-class destroyer which was fitted out as a flotilla leader and U-boat hunter.

On the 29th of March 1944, HMS Laforey was conducting a hunt for the German submarine, U-223, north of Palermo alongside several other similarly equipped destroyers.



HMS Laforey on Atlantic convoy escort duty 1943.



On the 30th of March 1944, and after the dropping of many depth charges, the U-Boat was forced to surface (likely after suffering structural damage from the concussion caused by the charges). It was then engaged by all ships by surface gunfire at a range of about 1,500 yards. Despite being vulnerable on the surface, U-223 was able to fire three torpedoes, which hit Laforey. The damage proved catastrophic and resulted in the rapid sinking of the ship. Sadly, all but 65 hands were lost with the ship.

Report by Alex Howes

Around the county with Alex and Benji - Brixworth

Last month, Benji and I decided to stay relatively local to Northampton by visiting the village of Brixworth. Despite being so close to Northampton, I would bet that the majority of people have only ever seen the country park and ring road surrounding the village. Many of these drivers likely have no idea how impressive and historic the village centre is.



Many of Brixworth's roads continue to follow the ancient routes travelled by Brixworth's medieval villagers.

The Domesday Book described Brixworth as an already ancient demesne. By the 1080s, the parish boasted a healthy number of households, the aforementioned Saxon church, and a major manor belonging to the De Curcy family. The manor would change hands multiple times (even temporarily becoming a royal estate) until it was demolished in the 18th-century. Whilst few of the surviving buildings can claim medieval origins (most dating from the 18th - 19th centuries), some clues to Brixworth's medieval past can still be seen. Notably, the 12th-century market cross is a prominent reminder of the early medieval parish. Additionally, many of the oldest streets continue to follow the routes used by medieval villagers making their way to the market.

Whilst not particularly old when compared to other villages in the county, Brixworth's buildings retain a unique and charming character. This is on account of locally quarried ironstone and limestone, which have been used to build most of the village's buildings. The extensive use of very local stone adds a striking range of colours which can be observed when walking the village streets. As you explore, expect to see a rather charming range of oranges, reds, and even blues.

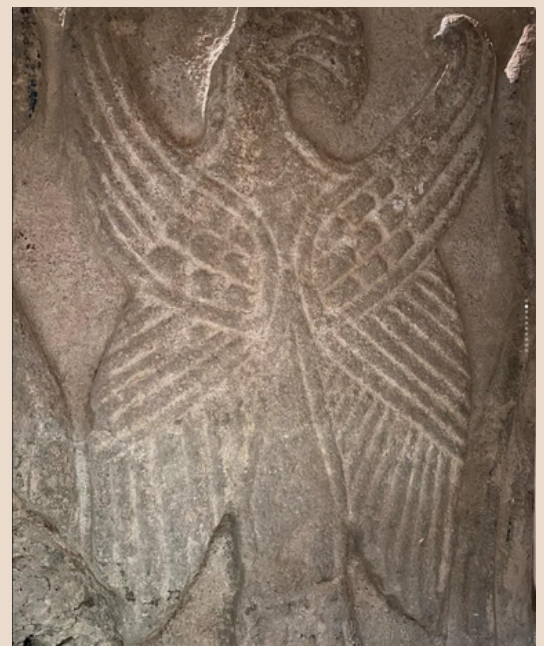
Whilst All Saints church would still be recognisable to the original Gaulis, Italian, and Saxon masons who built it from locally sourced ironstone and salvaged Roman brick, it has seen many changes during its long life. Notably, the first round of major alterations came during the late Saxon period, whilst the church was under Danish rule (following



As you walk up High Street you will notice many great examples of buildings made from Brixworth Ironstone.

The now relatively large village of Brixworth is probably best known today for the large Mercedes-Benz AMG powertrain plant, which develops key components for the major Formula 1 team. However, few realise that the village also hosts many well-preserved historic buildings. These include a medieval butter cross, an impressive 16th-century pub and cottages, and even a building described as 'the most important 17th-century building in northern Europe'. Some of you may already know of the building I am referring to.

Evidence of human activity on the village's site can be tracked as far back as the Neolithic period. However, the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record indicates that it wasn't until the emergence of an Iron Age village (which survived into the Roman and early Saxon periods) that Brixworth began growing in size and importance. In fact, it is the survival of Brixworth's pre-medieval past, through its Saxon church, which interests most visitors.



The remains of an Anglo-Saxon stone cross of St. John appears to have been recycled to repair the church during the early medieval period.

Alfred the Great's surrendering the land to Guthrum). The Danes likely removed the Saxon porticuses, which had been damaged during earlier Viking raids. Later alterations included a tower extension in the 11th-century, which added a characteristic (one of only four in the UK), and the addition of a 15th-century spire.

Other medieval alterations that can still be seen today include a beautifully decorated oak screen in the nave and the addition of the Lady Chapel by a local knight (Sir John de Verdun). Verdun can still be seen resting to this day in his well-preserved tomb!



A great view of the Church's characteristic semi-circular stair turret and medieval spire.



The Church's graveyard is a large bu peaceful place.

Unfortunately, whilst there remains much more to explore, this article only aims to introduce and inspire you to visit some of the county's hidden historic gems. If you wish to learn more about the village and its magnificent church, do visit it for yourself. Additionally, well-written and researched histories of the church and village are sold on site, with all proceeds helping to maintain the magnificent building. Additionally, the Brixworth History Society has installed a heritage trail which guides visitors past the village's most interesting buildings and sites. Once you have completed the trail and explored the church, do stay to refresh yourself at one of Brixworth's many independent pubs or coffee shops.

Article by Alex Howes



The Church's rude screen dates from the 15th century but was restored during the victorian period.



Surviving Saxon stonework is easy to spot from within the nave. Keep an eye out for all of the church's hidden features and secrets.



Another great view of the church from the village.



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 Aug 18th

Keep your diary free for our next talk on the evening of August 18th when non other than Andy Chapman will be visiting us!

Andy will be offering a fascinating talk which aims to introduce us to the archaeology of Northampton!



Starting from the Neolithic, and moving through the Bronze Age, all the way up to the destruction of Northampton's once magnificent royal castle, Andy will give us a breif but interesting tour of the town's history. He will do this by showing off the results of the many digs that he has been a part of through the years and what the artiacts found during them tell us about Northampton's long history.

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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