

# Amicis

The Magazine of the  
Friends of Nottinghamshire Archives  
No. 36 November 2024

## The Amazing Normal Man

A tribute to Wally Binch



The latest news from  
Nottinghamshire Archives

A history of busking and street  
performance

A visit to the Museum of  
Timekeeping

# Editorial

Welcome to AMICIS 36, the second edition of FONA's redesigned magazine. FONA is thrilled by the positive reception of our launch of AMICIS in the summer; thank you everyone who provided encouraging feedback. And thank you, too, to Bob Stoakes who has produced yet another top-quality layout. This issue brings you all the latest news from Nottinghamshire Archives and FONA together with a warm personal tribute to the remarkable Wally Binch from Nick Clark. FONA has had a great year and looks set to offer you a fascinating programme of talks and events in 2025. I look forward to seeing you all there.

**Karen Winyard** (Editor).

Submissions to AMICIS should be sent to [newsletter@fona.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@fona.org.uk) at any time.

**A Warm Welcome to FONA** to new members

Peter Whyte, Richard Maxwell, KC, Gill Sarre and Haf Merrifield. We look forward to meeting you in person at our future events.

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National Army Museum (NAM. 1985-11-36-115).

**Nottinghamshire Archives**  
Courtesy of Nick Clark.

**Busking**  
Courtesy of Bob Stoakes.

**Museum of Timekeeping, Upton**  
Andy Stephenson / Upton Hall / CC BY-SA 2.0.

## Letter from the Chair

# Who Wants To Be ... The Next FONA Chair?



- keeps in regular contact with Committee members and with others who are not committee members (e.g. the Magazine Editor) making sure that they are kept informed of what's going on.



- with the Secretary draws up Committee Agendas, chairs the Meetings and ensures that agreed Actions are met



- represents FONA at events and with other Societies. The Chair also attends as many FONA events as possible, introduces speakers and greets the members.

- anything else that the rest of the Committee doesn't cover.

I'm more than happy to talk all this through in more detail, so do get in touch if you are interested – I hope you are.

**Judith Mills**  
[chair@fona.org.uk](mailto:chair@fona.org.uk)

Might it be YOU?

Do you know what the Chair does?

Not sure of the answers, well there are a couple of 'lifelines' you can choose. You could 'Ask the Audience' or in this case fellow members what they think is involved. Or you can (with apologies for the awful pun) 'FONA-a-FRIEND' i.e. ME as I've been doing the job for the last 4½ years.

If you did ask me, here's what I would tell you:

Remember that FONA has two overall objectives. First, it supports and promotes what Nottinghamshire Archives does, as far as it is able. Second, it organises talks and events for its Members to enjoy, learn from or take part in.

The job of the Chair is to ensure that these objectives are met, without being too inflexible in its approach. In practice this means that the Chair:



- is the main point of contact between FONA and Ruth Imeson, the Heritage Services Manager. This covers liaising about everything from buying equipment or books and manuscripts to add to the Archives collection to finding out about new developments and projects.



Photo courtesy of Nick Clark.

# Update from Nottinghamshire Archives

## Accessions

Our archivists have received 75 new collections since the beginning of July 2024.

Incoming collections remain high with a wide variety of historical activity represented. We have seen an influx of records from the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England. A number of families have also donated or deposited collections including the Pask and Williamson families of Newark, the Norwebb family of Carlton, and Edmund Ilett of Warsop.

Adding to our English language collections, the latest edition of *East Midlands po Polsku* (East Midlands in Polish) includes an article on the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Air Bridge (Acc 10721). There are also new accessions related to the Nottingham Tram, Raleigh Cycle Company, and the Sherwood Forest Trust.

To name a few:

- Frearson family of Nottingham (10695)
- Sgt Arthur Golds of the 2nd Battalion Notts Home Guard (10696)
- Radford school records, including admission registers and log books (10698)
- Nottinghamshire Harmonic Society (10703)
- Caythorpe Cricket Club (10712)
- Thomas Forman and Sons (10726)



Photos courtesy of Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives.



Part of the Reclaiming Narratives exhibition. Photo courtesy of Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives.

## Exhibitions

We worked with local organisation The Bridge Notts CIC to curate an exhibition for Black History Month. This year's theme is 'Reclaiming Narratives' and highlights the richness and diversity of the Black Experience, showcasing "our contributions to society, our resilience, and our joy".

## Conservation

Conservator Jess Phipps Wardle took part in Ask A Conservator Day on Instagram on 4th November. This was part of our engagement activity to raise the profile of the conservation team, their unique input into the archive service, and to highlight the potential for commercial work. The team can repair your old books and documents. Jess and Paul Fuller can also make bespoke packaging as demonstrated by the box made for our copy of the fifteenth century Chronicle of the Brut.



The Brut Chronicle in its bespoke packaging box. Photo courtesy of Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives.

### Ruth Imeson

Heritage Services Manager

# The amazing normal man

## A personal tribute to Wally Binch (1922-2024)

In a year already marked by loss for the archives community, retired entertainer and soldier Wally Binch has died. That he reached his century seems an incredible achievement for a man who modestly described himself as totally normal in every way. But then Wally Binch was incredible.

He leaves two collections already deposited at Nottinghamshire Archives. The Sherwood Foresters Association (DD/SF) is a compendious series of biographical information about the men who served in his regiment with him during the Second World War and their commemorations together in the sixty years that followed. There is also the Wally Binch Collection (DD/2252) that covers his amazing life as an entertainer in the Nottingham area and beyond.

First and foremost, Wally was a performer. As a young lad he saw George Formby live in Nottingham and was so impressed he decided to learn his routine and perform it around the town. Whilst doing that, he entertained soldiers at the NAFFI, the war now being underway, and was impressed by their camaraderie. He resolved to enlist and so began a new chapter of his life that would remain important to him until his death. He joined the Sherwood Foresters and his ukulele went with him: there exists a Pathe news reel and a press photograph that shows Wally entertaining his comrades whilst on active service.



Wally (standing) entertains the 5th Army with his ukelele during clothes washing in Italy c1943. Image: National Army Museum (NAM. 1985-11-36-115).

Interestingly, many years later, staff from the Imperial War Museum approached Wally to ask him if he could remember what he had sung on that day - he could. Next question: could they record him singing it so they could add the actual song over the newsreel. He agreed, on the condition that his wife was sent out of the house first. Heaven knows what the lyrics were!

Wally survived the war, having served in Italy and North Africa, and many of his and his fellow servicemen's memories are preserved in the Sherwood Foresters Association archive. When it was all over, Wally returned to entertainment. With brother Dennis, he created a double act, 'The Binch Brothers', that combined music and comedy. Here Wally used his passion for invention and one of their routines involved miming to a record. The record player had a string attached to the arm so that it would play only so much of the disc before getting stuck, leaving the brothers singing the same line over and over again to comic effect.

The brothers happily played their show in all the local venues and even won a television set in a 1952 talent show (which they immediately sold). A poster from this time survives in Wally's collection (DD2252/3/4) and a copy of it hangs in a meetings room at the archives as well as a partial reproduction on locker 37 in the main searchroom. The act, unfortunately, was not to last, and tragedy struck when Dennis later suffered a heart attack in his car and died.

Wally subsequently partnered up with Jo who also became his wife. Again, his penchant for invention came to the fore, as he devised an act featuring electronic puppets which he built himself. As 'Wally and Jo Binch', they played children's shows, social clubs and parties on the local circuit and beyond throughout the 1960s and 1970s. There was even an appearance on the 'Opportunity Knocks' television show



Promotional shot of Wally and Jo with a couple of their puppets, c. 1970  
Credit- Nottinghamshire Archives (DD2552/6).

in which they came a creditable third. One of the acts that beat them was the glam rock band 'Mud'!

By the 1980s, Nottingham had become a hub for television production, opening up yet another phase in the career of the ever-resourceful Wally Binch. As a man in entertainment, he had an Equity card and so was very useful as an extra in any new productions being filmed locally. This led to many new opportunities. Whilst the Wally and Jo Binch duo worked as a warm-up act for such TV programmes as *'The Price is Right'*; Wally also found himself in actual productions including BBC's period civil war drama, *'By the Sword Divided'*. Wally's own memories of this included the recollection that, during a charge downhill, he had fallen over his scabbard. The clip was not used but the director liked the inadvertent stunt so much, Wally was obliged to repeat it in every subsequent take!

Photographs in the Wally Binch collection from this time include one with Alec Guinness, who featured in the TV movie *'Little Lord Fauntleroy'*; and sundry other stars from BBC and ITV period dramas. Where possible, Jo also worked with him, and they filmed together at Lincoln Cathedral for



Wally on the set of *'Little Lord Fauntleroy'* with Sir Alec Guinness Credit Nottinghamshire Archives (DD2552/8).

*'Prisoner of Zenda'* and a number of other local productions. Wally also played in a re-enactment for Crimewatch in 1994.

Following his retirement, Wally and Jo lived fairly quietly. He still did the odd piece of work such as appearing in a photo promotion for Nottingham City Council with his medals from the Second World War, but eventually even the Sherwood Foresters veterans disbanded as their numbers got fewer. Fortunately, Wally had kept the records of the association safe and deposited them with Nottinghamshire Archives. When I discovered Wally also had a wealth of ephemera from his entertainment career, I suggested he deposit that too and so The Wally Binch collection was given to the archives. Typically, Wally didn't think anyone would be interested in his life but, in truth, it was truly amazing from beginning to end. Who would have guessed that the extra on *'By the Sword Divided'*



Wally and wife Jo at *'A Soldier's War'* exhibition at Nottinghamshire Archives in 2005. Courtesy of Nick Clark.

had, himself, fought on the battlefields of an equally horrendous war four decades before? Who considered that the man entertaining with his 'Chatterbox' puppets had actually invented and built them himself or that half of the 'Wally and Dennis' act would go on to meet and work alongside Alec Guinness? It was the ability of Wally to keep going on and meeting the next big challenge throughout his long, industrious life with all its triumph and tragedies that made him so amazing. And in the end, to coin a phrase 'it turned out nice again'.

**Nick Clark**

# A History of Busking & Street Performance

As we enjoyed Dave Mooney's talk last year, we invited Dave back to give another talk in July. This time, Dave gave us a fascinating and entertaining presentation on the history of busking and street performance since the Industrial Revolution, focusing on the lives of significant performers.

Dave began his talk by playing his ukulele to set the mood. Busking has been a significant part of Dave's life, from being a student earning money to busking as a hobby. Studying History at university led to Dave's interest in the history of busking. As a teenager, Dave was first inspired by a street performer in Whitby called Michael Ray, who played a violin, a concertina and worked a dancing puppet. Dave could not find much evidence of him except a few newspaper clippings. One clipping described how he had been moved on from obstructing traffic, and another report claimed Ray threw his instruments to the ground to save a drowning man. So, as Dave says, he might be his busking hero, but he was an actual hero, too.

On the streets of Nottingham, the most recognised busker was Xylophone Man, whose name was Frank Robinson. Many of us remembered seeing him performing around Lister Gate, where there is now a memorial plaque in his name. Influenced by his hero, Dave got his puppet Nancy and first performed on Xylophone Man's spot in honour of





Dave with his puppet Nancy.

the popular street performer.

There have been a few significant street performers around the East Midlands: Shelford Tommy, Singing Sam, Billy Waters and Charley, to name a few. Each one has a different story to their life as a busker. In 1791, James Burn, also known as Shelford Tommy, was arrested for public nuisance. He got into trouble with antics such as throwing his voice at a fish; the maid preparing the fish thought it was talking and refused to cook it! He performed at race meetings such as the Forest Racecourse and fairs.

Singing Sam was a busker who performed around Derbyshire in the mid-eighteenth century with his bladder fiddle. In 1867, an author and illustrator, Llewellyn Jewitt, published a book about Derbyshire folk ballads. He used an image of Singing Sam on the front cover. He believed Singing Sam wrote one of the ballads comprising a long list of places in

Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Dave treated us to a performance of one segment.

Dave first came across Billy Waters in the Derby Museum as a statuette in one of the museum's glass cases. His research showed he was possibly American and, by the end of the eighteenth century, served as a formerly enslaved person in the Royal Navy. At some point, he fell off some rigging and lost one of his legs. Waters had a family to provide for. Fortunately, he could play the violin. He performed around the theatre district in London, where he became very popular. There are plenty of pictures and descriptions of him. All was going well until he became a character in a serialised story called *Life in London or Tom and Jerry* (not the cat and mouse!), illustrated by George Cruikshank. Dramatist

William Moncrieff put on a theatre production of the story, and the cast included beggars, buskers, and Billy Waters himself.

Unfortunately, according to sources, Billy was not portrayed on the stage as the cheerful person that he was. Instead, he was presented as greedy and unpleasant. The theatre-going public associated his stage character with the man himself, ultimately making his busking income dry up. Sadly, he ended up in the workhouse, having pawned his fiddle and eventually died there.

There is not much evidence about a man named Charley, except his instrument, attire, and the fact that children used to taunt him. But Charley's circumstances appear to be the beginning of the theme of buskers being from the low end of



Dave performing with his dancing robin.

society, who are disabled or suffering from mental health issues. Street performance was their way of earning a living.

Before World War II came the literary busker, with such authors as Laurie Lee, Walter Starkie and Walter Wilkinson. Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* tells of his long walk from the Cotswolds to London, playing his violin to earn money on the way. He learnt busker tricks, such as playing under bridges for better acoustics, eventually travelling to Spain to busk his way around the country.

Starkie fell in love with gypsy fiddler music and decided to travel around Europe playing his fiddle and wrote books about his travels.

Although busking tends to be an urban occupation, Wilkinson hated cities, and it seems during WW1, he encountered puppet shows. He did not like the violence of Punch and Judy, so he came up with his own puppet show, which he wheeled to different villages and hamlets and visited schools. He wrote books about his life and how empty his pockets were. Despite this, his books became popular and received reviews from D H Lawrence and J B Priestley. He became a celebrity and gave up performing to do lecture tours around America. All three authors have books available in Bromley House library.

Buskers are still with us today and continue to be portrayed in films, modern music, and books. The 1930s saw Charles Lawton and Vivien Leigh star in *St Martins Lane or Sidewalks of London* alongside genuine buskers. In more recent times music from bands like the Levellers and books like *Tabby McTat* by Julia Donaldson highlight how social attitudes have changed towards buskers and street performers.

## Sally Woollard

# Dates for your Diary

## 30 November 2024

*An informal, Members' meeting* with Mince Pies (and possibly cake) and an opportunity to share a funny, intriguing, touching or historically important story about your family history with other members - or just have a chat.

## 2025 Programme

**PLEASE NOTE: the normal pattern of meetings has had to be amended this year, so please note these dates in your diary.**

## 18 January 2025

*Nottingham's Dark side* by Chris Weir.

## Late February/early March 2025

Details to follow.

## 5 April 2025

*Annual General Meeting*

Followed by a talk on *Gardens of Delight: a glimpse into the variety of historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes in Nottinghamshire* by Jason Mordan, Chairman the Nottinghamshire Gardens Trust.

## 21 June 2025

*Some Nottingham Women Artists: an exploration of less well-known women artists in the 19th and early 20th century* by Sian Trafford, Nottingham Women's History Group.

## Summer excursion

Details to follow.

## 20 September 2025

*Women in Medieval Nottingham* by Dr Richard Goddard, University of Nottingham.

## End November/early December

*Annual Members' Meeting.*

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings start at 10.30 for tea/coffee with the talk starting at 11am. Meetings are free to all Members. Visitors are asked to make a donation of £3 towards costs. There may be an additional charge for excursions or workshop events.



*Selling a Wife*  
(1812 - 1814)  
by Thomas Rowlandson,  
Hermitage.  
Public Domain.

# Inspired by Nottinghamshire Archives

It was a pleasure to give my talk, 'In and Out of Wedlock' to FONA in October because without the archives, this talk would not exist. Usually, I visit Nottinghamshire Archives with a specific goal in mind; either to research an individual or an institution and sometimes that research leads to a talk or article for publication. In this instance it felt as though 'In and Out of Wedlock' was gifted to me almost fully formed.



*The Wedding Morning*,  
John Frederick Henry Bacon.  
Public Domain.

The talk explores women's experiences of marriage in the nineteenth century, a period that saw the beginnings of reform and change in social perceptions of, and the laws pertaining to married women. This was not a subject I had ever considered or thought about. Over a few years I had worked on three unrelated projects: the Poor Laws, Anne Cooke's journal and the Savile family. My interest in Assistant Poor Law Commissioner Edward Gulson, led me to the diary kept by Anne Cooke during part of the time she lived in Southwell. (DD 689/1 & 2)

Within the diary I discovered Elizabeth Anderson, a working-class woman courageous enough to adopt an unconventional means of separation from her husband; and two middle class women, Marianne Bristoe and Caroline Berdmore Fowler Berdmore whose relationship was even more unconventional. Further documents in Nottinghamshire Archives allowed me to research their stories, including the Wills of Miss Bristoe and Miss Berdmore, and I filed each away as independent items of quirky interest.

Meanwhile FONA's Savile project had piqued my interest in the Savile family and the extensive collection held at Nottinghamshire Archives. I wanted to explore the relationships between the seventh and eighth Earls of Scarbrough, and between the eighth earl and his mistress, Agnes, and their children. There is a wealth of correspondence in the Savile collection that is surprising and revealing. Two particular bundles, DD SR 212 and DD SR 221, contained letters relating to the marital discord between the seventh earl and his wife, Anna Maria. Letters that still have the power to shock today and which provide an intimate account of an unhappy marriage.

Now I began to see a pattern emerging from these independent areas of research and was able to build a framework that would connect them into a single project as case studies on the way ordinary women from varied walks of life experienced the married state. Which led me back to the Poor Laws and another woman, Caroline Jenks, whose second husband had been abusive, but who was able to benefit from nineteenth century changes in the law and to escape from her marriage.

This is one of the great benefits of having a brilliant county archive. So many people, institutions and stories are unexpectedly connected. You set off looking at one document and find yourself travelling unforeseen highways and byways within the archives that reveal vistas of social history that are as fascinating as they are unanticipated.

**Karen Winyard**



Andy Stephenson / Upton Hall / CC BY-SA 2.0

# An excursion to The Museum of Timekeeping and Upton Village

On Thursday 12th September, members of FONA and the Thoroton Society joined forces for a visit to the Museum of Timekeeping and a walking tour of the village of Upton.

We were greeted on arrival by our guide Dave and coffee and biscuits. An introductory talk gave us a short history of clockmaking and how it developed from a simple water clock to the sophisticated clocks and timepieces we use today.



The group listening to Dave.

We toured the Museum with Dave who gave a commentary about the exhibits and discovered the difference between a clock and a timepiece. Part of the museum is dedicated to the Speaking Clock, dating from 1936 which is known to many as TIM. It was interesting to find out how the different voices of Tim were found, most after extensive searching. The original recordings were made on glass discs; one each for hours, minutes and seconds. More modern recordings were made on tape. As the group wandered around the Museum, the Library, overseen by a dedicated custodian, was recommended for a visit. The Journals of the British Horological Society are kept here, together with books on the technical developments of clocks and timepieces. The Society Journal, founded in 1858 is thought to be the oldest technical journal in the UK and possibly in Europe.



Dave explaining some of the clocks.

After lunch at the Cross Keys pub in Upton, the group set out on a walking tour of the village led by Dr Richard Jones. Upton is sometimes described as the village built on the bend in the road. The tour started in the Cross Keys which has a map dated 1795 on a wall, showing the land boundaries of the

parish and individual holdings when enclosure was completed. We walked along the original footpaths to the church of St Peter and St Paul. The church is mainly 13th century with a 14th century chantry and a magnificent tower topped by eight pinnacles. There does not seem to be any development after the 15th century although there are signs of renovation in the 1860s. The church contains a 14th century Parish chest and a chapel of the De Brose family, whose famous member was a Chancellor of Edward III. In the chapel, there is a squint so that 2 masses could be held at the same time and the Host raised could be seen in each. The church is built on higher ground giving a clear view over the Trent valley as can be seen in the photograph.



In the churchyard with the Trent Valley beyond and below St Peter and St Paul church.



Upton Village is a conservation village and is remarkable in that the farmhouses border the main road. The Parish boundaries are thought to be unchanged since its inception. The first mention

of Upton was in 996CE in the reign of King Oswin although it is not mentioned in Domesday as a separate village but as part of Southwell. Excavations have revealed no pre-conquest material but a quantity of 12th and 13th century pottery found along the line of the escarpment on which the church stands. After leaving the church, we returned to the coach through footpaths back to the main road and past the remnant of the village green.

This small area of land has had seating installed by the village community giving the footweary a rest. The land has Bramley apple trees growing on and around it. The villagers retain commoners' rights to the apples from these trees. Upton has experienced a stable population over the years and gives an impression of being rebuilt, recycled and renovated using the same brick and pantile materials used since the 18th century.

With thanks to Dr Richard Jones for his interesting and entertaining tour of Upton.

**Ruth Strong**

*Images of the tour courtesy of Ruth Strong..*





# Friends of Nottinghamshire Archives

The Friends of Nottinghamshire Archives (FONA) supports Nottinghamshire Archives by

- purchasing manuscripts, books or other items which come onto the open market and depositing them at Nottinghamshire Archives so that they are protected and publicly accessible.
- Purchasing equipment for use by the Conservation team, archivists and visitors.
- Organising joint events.
- One-off projects, for example in 2022-3 a group catalogued and researched a collection of uncatalogued documents and then published a book about their work.

## Membership

If you would like to join FONA please visit our website where you can download a membership application form.

For its Members, FONA organises a series of talks and other events on a broad range of topics. AMICIS is published three times each year.

## Contact

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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVXJ1DIsCNOOrTxJcFHViyNQ>



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# Nottinghamshire Archives

## Visit

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## Explore the Archives catalogue

The Archives are the record office for the county of Nottinghamshire and the diocese of Southwell and Nottingham. Our archives date back to the 12th century and cover over 800 years of the county's history. We hold over 4 million archives, so there really is something for everyone!

## Research Service

Our experienced researchers can look up information in online sources and archival documents.

## Enquiries

Archive enquiries can be made by letter, email or via our online form.

## Reprographic Services

Order digital photographs or scans of most archive documents. There is also a wealth of images to explore in the picture archive, where you can also add your own photographs to our pictorial heritage at [inspirepicturearchive.org.uk](http://inspirepicturearchive.org.uk).

## National Accreditation

Nottinghamshire Archives has National Accreditation status in the management and delivery of the services it provides.