

EXCURSION

Nottingham Sandstone Caves

Leader: Tony Waltham

Wednesdays 14th and 21st February 2001

This excursion was repeated, as each had to be limited to 25 people, but it was still over-subscribed, and it may be repeated again next winter. Its popularity may have been due to the opportunity to see the caves in the company of the author of the Society's very successful publication *Sandstone Caves of Nottingham* (£4.50 from the Secretary); or maybe that the trip was free.

There are hundreds of man-made caves cut in to the Nottingham Castle Sandstone under the city centre. One large group lies behind the old sandstone cliff spanned by the Broad Marsh Centre, and part of these forms the Caves of Nottingham, open to visitors during opening hours of the shopping centre. A number of caves are seen along the underground trail, including the old tannery site, and exhibits have been arranged to illustrate how the caves were used in times past, and then as air-raid shelters in 1939-1945.

The visit was arranged for Wednesday evenings, when members of the Nottingham Archaeological and Historical Society (NHAS) meet to excavate caves that have been filled with rubble and debris during successive stages of site. During the walk through the tourist section of the caves, Tony explained their history, and pointed out the engineering structures created when building the shopping centre to avoid damaging those caves of historical importance. It was particularly interesting to see a tiny part of the original Drury Hill surviving on the rock above caves that had been cut out beneath the old street.

We then headed into the western caves where NHAS archaeologists were working to clear caves that were used as stables in the 1800s, in order to find more about their earlier history. From these, we emerged into the night through a newly opened hole in the cliff, in a triangle of land that is now otherwise inaccessible between various modern buildings. We then went back into the cliff into the three caves under the garden of Willoughby House (by kind permission of the owner). These were the suitably magnificent wine cellars of Lord Willoughby, and it is suspected that they were also used as social drinking rooms. Further west along the cliff, the one remaining segment of the Black's Head caves was visited. Sadly, most of the caves here are now full of concrete, including a malt kiln and a tannery found and then filled during emergency engineering work. Tony also told how he was not quite tall enough to acquire some modest wealth during exploration of the cave. Intrigued? Buy the book or put your name down for the next trip.

Alan Filmer