

A REPORT ON THE WORLD BOTTING REUNION 2008

On Friday May 23rd 2008 a group of 37 Botting Descendents made their way to the village of Alfriston to attend a global reunion of this family name. This group of attendees originated from Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and was to be the result of three years of planning by Maggie Shanks and her committee in close liaison with Desmond Botting in New Zealand.

The venue for this gathering was Dean's Place Hotel in the village of Alfriston in East Sussex. During the course of the afternoon the meeting and greeting of each other was a relaxed and very informal affair and for most of us it was the first time we were able to meet Maggie in person. In casual conversation we were able to exchange snippets of information about family backgrounds and experiences of times past. So as we enjoyed our first meal together that night, we all felt very comfortable in each others company. Bed that night was reasonably early for those who had just prior, traveled long distances on international flights.

Saturday 24th May

Following breakfast all members assembled in the conference room, setting out displays of photos and other family memorabilia for all of us to look through, and further conversations of course, before formal proceedings began. Information packs were distributed, name tags issued, a list indicating where we had all come from for the weekend given to us, and then a novel way of being introduced took place. We were given a brief cryptic clue from which each of us individually had to identify another member, introduce ourselves, learn as much as we could about our new "Buddy" and then introduce this person to the group. As is often the way this took rather longer than planned for. Consequently we were all late for lunch.

As almost everyone had arrived by car the provision of time for a local area group tour planned for the afternoon was changed to a period of free time for us to do "our own thing". Those without wheels became chalk hillside and went on to visit Michelen Priory. Dinner that night was a celebratory dinner and was also served in the conference room.

Following dinner it had been arranged for two illustrated talks to be given. The first talk was designed to describe the emigration firstly of the Botting brothers Robert, Francis, Frederick, Thomas and their sister Jane to Australia, landing at what is now the city of Adelaide. This was then expanded to cover the family activities over the next twenty nine years at which point only the one member Robert William came on to New Zealand with most of his large family. Des was able to support this with a "power point" display of photographs and maps. The second talk was given by the Rev. John Botting who has made a study of Botting family men who fought in the First World War and lost their lives in so doing. John was able to make available a C.D. disc for those of us who were interested.

Sunday 25th May

Following the traditional cooked “English” breakfast, we all left at 9am for a church service in the ancient Westmeston Church. This was conducted by Rev. Des Botting, who was assisted by Rev John Botting and Cannon Michael Botting. The sermon preached by Des Botting explored the concepts of family units that, like the stone building blocks of the church itself, had held together over all the centuries, within a faith that has stood firm as a lifelong guide and anchoring point. Before moving to the nearby parish hall for morning tea, put on by the local parishioners, we had time to explore the church environs and generally soak up the atmosphere of this wonderful old building. Thirteen Botting graves are to be found in the church environs: twelve grouped together near to the side church entrance and one by itself to the right of the path leading up to the side entrance. The engravings on the stones are mostly legible although a few are now unreadable due to the ravages of time. They have been recorded. While having morning tea we were introduced to Vincent, a local resident who had attend the service and who lived in a medieval home very near to the church. This house, part of a joint three home integrated medieval structure was once lived in by a Botting family member. Vincent was absolutely passionate about his home and its connections and invited us to see through it. Complying with his desires we found an almost unaltered building even complete with a resident colony of bats in the roof cavity. One could have explored this little settlement at length but we had to move on to keep an appointment at Okehurst Manor which was a further forty minutes drive away. This is where the twelve Javelins are mounted on the ceiling of the entrance hall. It was built in 1696 and is a collection of fine old buildings of the period. Over time maintenance repairs have been carried out but carefully done in keeping with the original appearance. After being warmly received by the present owners and having our packaged lunches on the front lawn we were invited inside where our hosts must have been more than a little amused to see us one by one lie down on the floor to photograph this remarkable ceiling.

Dinner that night was at Dean’s Place Hotel and was followed by the third planned talk given by Robert Noyes on the place and usefulness of the science of D.N.A. in clarifying and certifying family membership.

Monday 26 May.

After breakfast we drove to Hammerwood Park which has land ownership links to a Hugh Botting .This remarkable home was built by Benjamin Henry Latrobe in 1792. The present owner is one David Pinnegar who rescued this building in 1982 in a totally derelict state, a sample of the state of the destruction still on show today in the original banqueting room, which has yet to be restored. Like other owners of historic buildings David is totally consumed with a passion to bring this home back to its former glory and is methodically working to this end as finance becomes available. In the mid 1500s a prosperous yeoman called Hugh Botting purchased the estate. He died in 1560 leaving his widely distributed lands to his family but reserving the principal chamber in his house called “The Bower” to the use of his wife Joan. Whether this house was on the site of the farmhouse up the lane leading to the present park or on the site of the present homestead is unclear. Some time after 1588 the Bottings founded an iron forge at the

Bower which was situated immediately to the left of the lake as one looks from the house. In so doing the Bottings had entered an industry which had a burial slab set into the floor commemorating "John Botting" of the Bower dated 1622. Eventually the Bottings fell on hard times and had to sell up to a rising East Grinstead family, the Paynes in 1628, but it would appear that they continued in occupation of the land until the end of the 17th Century when eventually they relinquished the Bower.¹

After leaving Hammerwood Park the group drove to the nearby Cowden Church St. Mary Magdalene... and indeed we did find the memorial cast iron plaque set into the floor at the front and just below the pulpit.

This concluded the activities associated with the reunion and those that returned to the hotel to sleep over the Monday night enjoyed a last chance over dinner to bid family members a friendly farewell and safe homeward journey.

(This was written Norris Smith from New Zealand, descendent of Garibaldi Botting.)

¹ Some of the factual history in the above two paragraphs is taken from David Pinnegar's descriptive booklet about his home and I wish to acknowledge this.