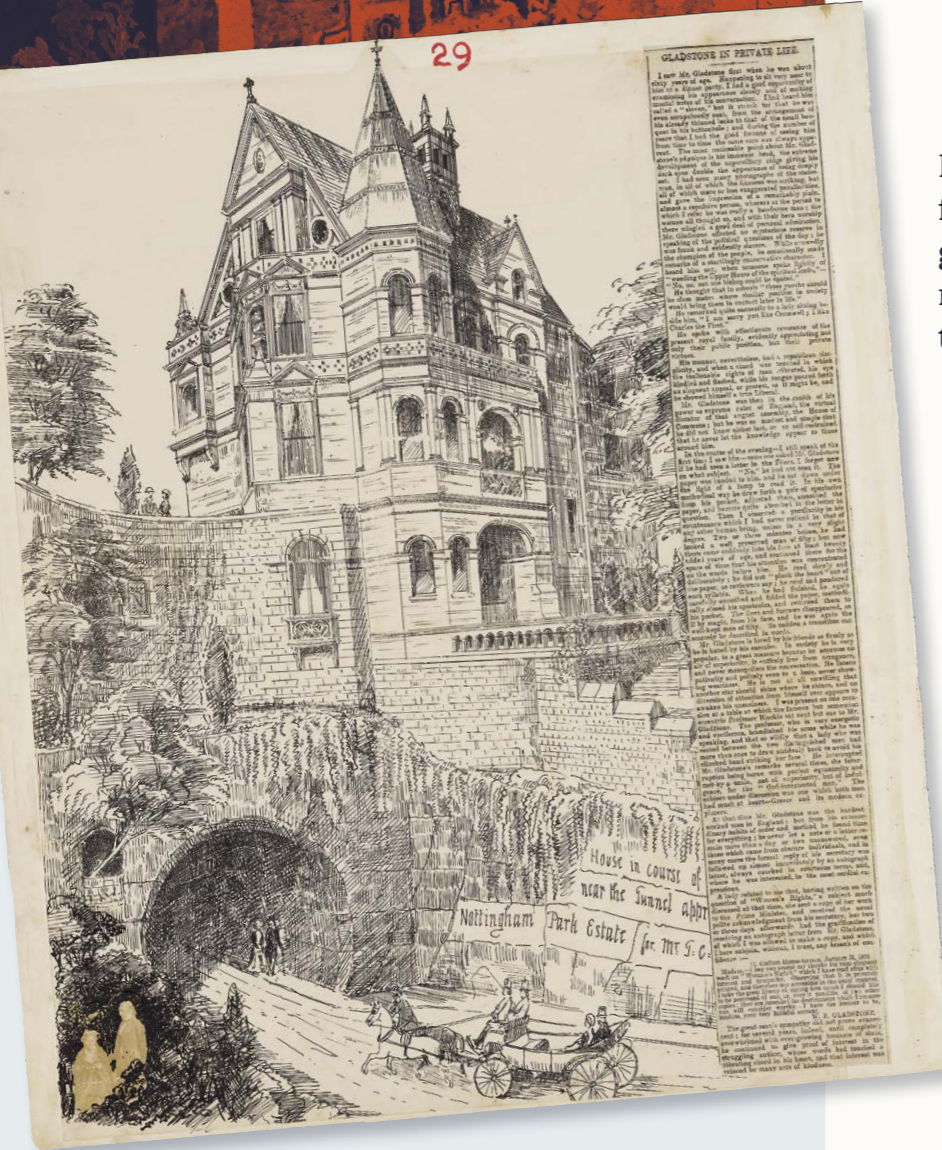


Shelter and refuge

In the nineteenth century, many of Nottingham's wealthiest and most prominent families created elaborately carved caves as leisure spaces in their large town gardens, with pillared chambers and sculptures of figures from classical mythology and the Bible. In the Park Estate, the Duke of Newcastle gave land for the digging of a huge tunnel which could be used as a carriage drive from The Park to Derby Road, still one of the largest caves visible in Nottingham today.

In contrast to the pleasure grounds of the city's wealthy families, caves often provided shelter for some of the city's poorest inhabitants. According to a 17th century saying, "If a man is poor, he has only to go to Nottingham with a mattock, a shovel, a crow, an iron, a chisel or a mallet, and with such instruments he may play mole and work himself a hole or burrow for his family". Caves dug into the cliff face in Hollowstone and at Sneinton were lived in up to the 19th century, as revealed by census returns. Cave houses were looked at with horror by urban reformers as damp, unventilated and insanitary, and in 1845 the Enclosure Act banned the renting of cellars and caves as homes for the poor, although it must be said the city's rows of back-to-back houses probably didn't provide much better living conditions.

In the twentieth century, caves found a new purpose: providing Nottingham residents with vital shelter from the impact of bombing during WW2. There are extensive records documenting the conversion of over 80 caves into public shelters. As well as re-using ancient structures, the City Council also dug what were probably the first new caves in a century when they created a large public shelter beneath Castle Rock, consisting of a large network of linear tunnels.



'The Park Tunnel' from a scrapbook compiled by T.C. Hine, containing autograph letters and facsimile letters of royalty and distinguished churchmen, architects, authors, scientists and others; 1647-c.1890, p.29. University of Nottingham MS 575/1/164



'Sneinton Hermitage' from Album of view-postcards, chiefly of Nottingham; undated. University of Nottingham EMSC Oversize Not 1.D14 ALB



Conveyance from Samuel Parsons and others to Henry Pelham-Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle under Lyne of a piece of ground known as Tunnel Road, Nottingham Park, Nottingham; 22 March 1845. University of Nottingham Ne 6 D 2/37/2



Engraved illustration of a brick house on a rock, with caves excavated underneath, from Album of prints depicting Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; c.1810, p.49. University of Nottingham EMSC Over.X Not 1.D14 ALB

Tales from the Caves

Exploring Nottingham's underground stories



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