

At our meeting in September Simon Tomson was our speaker. Simon stepped in to cover the pre-booked speaker at short notice, replacing the advertised speaker. The talk was entitled Wood Hall Moated Manor. Simon who lives in Pontefract was the Director of excavations at the site and has worked in the industry for many years on a broad range of projects. The site of Wood Hall Moated Manor lies in land just north of the village of Womersley, to the north of Doncaster. The land was acquired in the 1960s by the CEGB together with Gale Common for waste disposal. Ash from Eggborough and Ferrybridge Power Stations is mixed with water to form a slurry, which is then piped to the Gale Common site where it dries out. The CEGB and North Yorkshire County Council paid half a million pounds to have a ten year excavation project undertaken on the site. They wanted to study and survey in detail the landscape and surrounding area and to record what part it took within the local community. As part of the project Simon had archaeology students working in site and also universities across the country specialising in archaeology also helped in dating and preserving articles found on the site. The site can be dated as being used for over 1000 years to the Prehistoric and Romano-British Periods. On the site Simon was able to prove that there were people living on the site in the medieval Period. He could prove that for example the kitchen was positioned on the far edge of the site. This was because the building would have been wooded and due to the construction of the kitchen and the high temperatures, these types of buildings would often catch fire about every 3-4 years on average. Placing the kitchen away from the other buildings, if the kitchen caught fire the rest remained safe. However there was one downside - the food would always be served cold due to the distance involved. On the site there was also a fish pond or a Stew-Pond where they would breed fish. Remembering that fish would have been eaten on Fridays and at Easter, and with not being close to the sea they would breed it so they had fish close to hand.

In 1183 Wood Hall changed its ownership when Dionysia Otes de Tilley married into the Newmarch Family. The Newmarch's owned land around Askern and Doncaster. It was in



the mid 1300s when Adam de Newmarch had some of the buildings deliberately destroyed. The Fishpond was filled in and a drainage ditch was filled in. This made way for a moat to be dug around the site. It was 13 feet wide but only about 5 foot deep. During this period there was a lot of unrest and it was much safer to have a moat around your land. This meant that you were surrounded by water. It didn't matter that it was only 5 foot deep as it would have been difficult to predetermine the depth and therefore you were safe within. If you have a moat you needed to get out when it was safe so you built a bridge or drawbridge. The one Adam De Newmarch built was found and can be dated to 1248. This was established as carbon dating was done on the timbers found. They were accurately dated to have been felled in the spring on 1248. Also these timbers were found to have 199

growth rings. Between 1403 and 1440 the history of Wood Hall becomes unclear as Ralph de Newmarch was killed at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. However in about

1440 Elizabeth De Newmarch married John Neville from Oversley in Lincolnshire. It was clear that there was some neglect to the site during the first half of the 1400s. But Simon and his team were able to find hedge and rose cuttings in a large cistern in the centre of the site. They can even say the roses were pruned with a 45° angle just above a bud. In 1457/58 the old bridge was destroyed and a new bridge was installed with a stone gatehouse. From the evidence that was left there was no drawbridge during this period, which Simon states would have been very dangerous. From this period until the early 1490s there was a complete refurbishment of the Hall. This would have been a simple late medieval hall, with stone wall footings and a timber structure with a clay floor. As with all buildings of this type everyone would live and sleep together. However this building was built with a solar or first floor chamber to allow the master some privacy. This would have been at the most northern part of the building. In the middle there would have been an open communal hall with a hearth and smoke hood against the west wall. At the southern edge there was a pantry and buttery. The New kitchen was about 1.5m to the south of the new hall. This new hall also had a modern lavatory system where a plank of wood with holes in would span a pit. The waste would have been emptied about every 3 months by some unfortunate sole and used on the gardens – they even recycled in those days, including the kitchen waste.

During this period these medieval Halls were being changed into houses.

John and Elizabeth Neville's daughter Joan was married to Sir William Gascoigne of Cusworth, Harewood and Lotherton,

and it was through her that the Gascoignes inherited Wood Hall and Womersley on John Neville's death in 1482. The old bridge was only 35 years old when William built an impressive new bridge and gatehouse that was two storeys with a dining hall. They would have also fished in the moat from this gate house in the moat from a platform using a lantern and Eel spear, all of which was found in the moat during the dig. In



this building perishable foods would have been stored and they also found evidence of an early form of water pump. A timber from one of the earlier bridges was bored out and had tin or zinc supports on the outside. This would provide them with running water. There was a privy (Private) garden where trenches were found for growing vegetables. In 1600 Wood Hall passed into the Twistleton Family with a marriage to Christopher Twistleton. The Twistleton's came from the Drax and Snaith areas. Christopher transformed the hall into a house by adding a second floor. He included plaster friezes above wood paneling. In the plaster would have been lion's heads, grapes, flowers acorns and holly. Plaster work is white and this would have given light into the house which would have been rather dark inside. Other examples of this type of work can be found in Tickhill Castle close to Doncaster.

In the moat from this period they found a lots of diamond shaped glass, and when examined in the lead work the maker had put in the date 1681. A catholic Mass vessel

was found which is thought to have been thrown into the moat during the Tudor times. A medieval ring was also found with the words “pour approuver”, to approve of, in French. They also found a barrel with the traders mark on the lid, showing it came through Hull. In the late 1800s early 1900s the hall was demolished yet again and replaced with a Farm House, complete with drains, water, and farm yard. A “Witch Bottle” was found under the threshold. A bottle with cork bung containing pins that would prevent witches from entering the house. Crockery seconds from the Wedgewood factory in Ferrybridge were found in the farmhouse. This farm house was in the hands of the Harke Family originally parsons. They invented the steam turbine and the hypodermic syringe. The Farm house was refurbished in 1930s. A damson and apple orchard was found and a piggery. A photo was shown where there was a tea party in 1932 in the garden. They also found a belt buckle from a German soldier who would have served in North Africa in 1942. This would have belonged to a Prisoner of War who would probably have been held at a POW camp in Askern. This ended a very interesting talk, plenty of questions were asked at the end and Simon was thanked for his talk in our normal manner.

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