

# PONTARCH

An Occasional Newsletter  
for members of PONTEFRACT &  
DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOC.

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Special Issue  
SWALES' YARD

IMPORTANT!!!!

Dr. Manchester's lecture will be  
on the 16th March & not the date  
published in your programme.  
Please make a note of this.

## SOCIETY BEGINS RECORDING?

For nearly thirty years this Society has kept an eye on the jettied building in Swales' Yard, next to the *Malt Shovel*, off Cornmarket. There has never been any doubt that underneath the rendering would be found a timber-framed house of the type common in York, Chester, and other historic cities. Indeed, the gaps in the rendering have shown massive corner posts, whilst the ends of the joists have left no doubt at all.

Recently, the building has been bought by Mr. M. Lister, who asked the Society to record the structure, and cavate in the yard to the rear.

In the beginning, the building was almost completely filled with the debris which had accumulated over the years, including furniture and rubble. Everything was filthy, and the roof leaked in places.

Mr. Lister himself has been active in removing later partition walls, and now at last, the interior is clear enough to make recording possible.

Before actually beginning the work, your Committee met and agreed on a set of priorities in view of the importance of the site. It was agreed that the actual building, being one of the last timber-framed survivals in the town, should be recorded to the best possible standards. Though the owners of the adjacent building had also given permission for whatever work we considered necessary, the Committee felt that all energies should be devoted to recording standing structure.

There is undoubtedly interesting archaeology beneath the buildings, but it was felt that any attempt to investigate this (largely unthreatened material) would be impossible in the time available. Instead, excavation would be limited to trenches in advance of services; the wisdom of this decision has since been born out.

At the time of writing, the full architectural record is almost complete, whilst a preliminary trench is showing a keyhole view of what may be the origins of the site.

# THE SWALES' YARD PROJECT.

## FIRST INTERIM REPORT, JANUARY, 1990

It is possible that Cornmarket developed as part of the town in the period 1200 - 1250 and is West *Chepe*. There is a reference in 1257 when Edmund de Lacy extended to it the privileges of Pontefract. The north-western extension of the town plan certainly suggests a previous plan, to some extent. If this is so, then it is arguable that the site in Swales' Yard was not occupied before the thirteenth century. The buildings are apparently some of the few now remaining from the period of the great re-building of 1560 - 1640.

The house belonged to Leonard Healaughe who was an Alderman by 1561, also in 1584, and Mayor in 1565-6. He died, no longer an Alderman, in 1601. His will of March 4<sup>th</sup> that year has specific reference to the property which his descendants did not retain for long; by 1657 it belonged to Alderman Robert Frank and was, at 2/2<sup>d</sup> (13<sup>p</sup>) the most highly-rated house in the town! As the Frank family relinquished their interests in Pontefract and moved to Campsall, the property seems to have lost importance.

The Medieval building was in two main sections: a large house on Cornmarket, with a range at right-angles to the rear, along Swales' Yard ginnel. The house, like the neighbouring *Malt Shovel* inn, has a substantial stone-vaulted cellar, but the timber-framed superstructure was enclosed in brick in the late Eighteenth Century.

The back range contained the service and storage buildings, which were extended on three separate occasions as the house grew, creating a small terrace facing onto the lane to the south, and a garden or courtyard to the north. This range has remained largely untouched. The buildings have stone

ground floors, and timber-framed upper storeys which project beyond the ground-floors, like the more famous *Shambles* at York.

The last two sections were amalgamated to form a single undivided structure almost 20 metres long and 4.2 metres wide. The ground floor is of superior workmanship with a beamed ceiling 2.5 metres high, a row of small windows, and a single door on each side at opposite ends of the room.

It may have been a combined shop/office/display room for the merchant's wares, whilst the upper floor, reached by stone steps at one end, was less well-finished and may have housed servants or been used for storage.

The upper walls consist of tall, narrow panels of lime-daub mixed with straw and hair, between upright timber planks, called *studs*. The long walls were linked by transverse timbers at head-height, and these supported the trusses which held the roof-rafters. The main timbers are of oak, secured with dowel-pegs.

The building was re-roofed twice, the second time probably when the long room was split into cottages in the eighteenth century. Many of the timbers are crudely numbered in sequence, showing they were fashioned elsewhere and assembled on site to a predetermined plan.

The building will be carefully restored over the next four years and the yard used for car-parking. The trial excavations in advance of the gas and water pipes have shown that the plot was originally enclosed by a wall, or perhaps a building parallel to *Cornmarket*.

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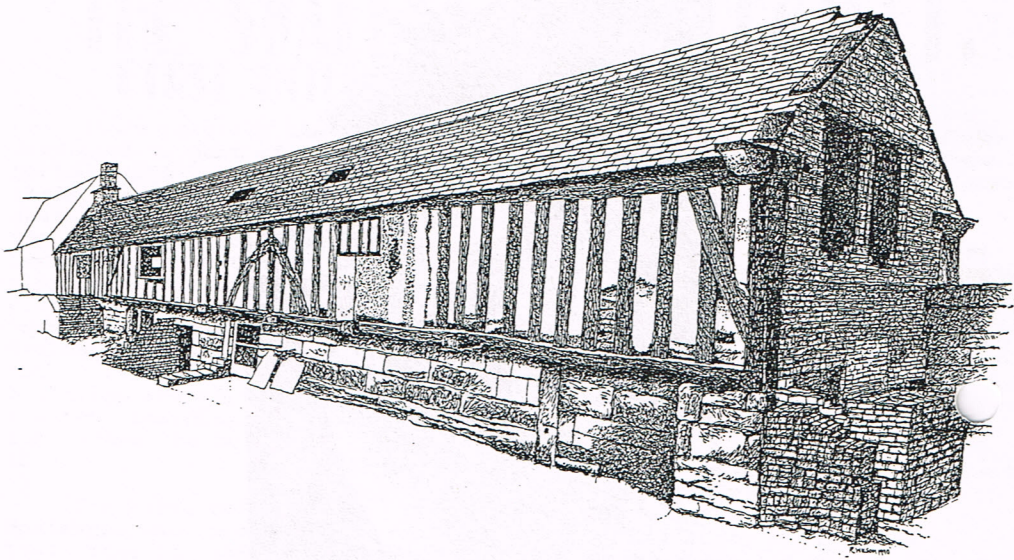
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The South side of the structure, photographed in the early seventies.  
28mm lens.

The same aspect today, but without the derelict cobble's shop.  
24mm lens.





The Northern aspect today, with rendering removed.  
Drawing by Ron Wilson.

The Northern aspect in the early seventies with rendering almost intact.  
28mm lens.

