

Number 18, Dec 1991

THE MUSEUM, SALTER ROW, PONTEFRACT WF8 1BA. ☎ 702995 (home)

# PONTARCH



Pontefract & District Archaeological Society.

Editor: Eric Houlder, Past-President.

## Editorial.



It is good to see so much activity in the Society again. The chief reasons for this, of course, are the new members Simon and John, professionals from the Wood Hall dig, of which more inside. They have already investigated the possibility of running a dig in north Featherstone.

For many years some of us have noted a cropmark, visible from Featherstone Lane during hot summers if one looked north across Mr G Boothroyd's farmland. We knew that local farmers had grubbed out most of the length of this section of road, 28b, in the 1840s, but there was good reason to hope that some of the surface survived beneath spoil-heaps of early collieries. Alas, it was not to be; The farmers had been all too thorough.

However, we are now looking for another Winter project, so if you know of something, please let us know at the address above.

We asked for programme ideas in our last issue. Please respond, for there is so little feed-back from Members. Some articles for *PontArch* would be welcome too. Several have been

received that were too specialist in other disciplines. Our thanks for these, and authors, please do not be too offended if we did not use them, and better luck next time.

## ROMAN ROAD SEARCH.

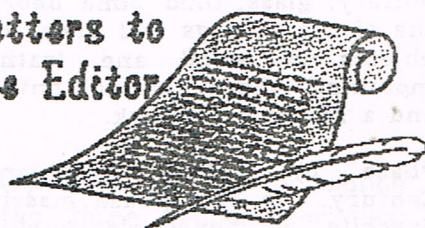
The Society has been involved in fieldwork at Park Farm, North Featherstone, this Autumn. The original intention was to explore the possibility of carrying out a full-scale dig on the Roman road here. Members would have been notified had this been possible.

A small excavation was organised to try and locate the track of the Doncaster (DANUM) to Castleford (LAGENTIUM) Roman road, Margary 28b, just south of the M62. Local information was sought, maps studied, the farmer Mr G Boothroyd consulted, and the first sod cut.

However, despite the careful siting of the trenches, (designed to look beneath the upcast of a bell-pit which we thought might have preserved any road material) we found only clean natural. We do, however, have a very informative section through the tail of a bell-pit spoil-heap! It is believed that local

farmers in the mid 19th Century cooperated to grub up the Roman road in a concerted effort, since it was frustrating their ploughing due to its extreme resistance, resulting in damage to the plough, rather than plough-damage! Since no contemporary topsoil is preserved beneath the bell-pit upcast - it lies directly on weathered coal-measures sands - it appears that the bell-pit excavation may be mid 19th Century too.

## Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

On the Great Pestilence.

I refer to your special report in *PontArch* no.17 on The Black Death Cemetery in London. The name 'Black Death' is a much later name for the plague which affected Britain in 1348-9. It was in fact coined in 1823 by a Mrs Penrose.

Contemporary accounts referred to the epidemic as *The Great Pestilence* or *The Great Mortality*. The religious house that you refer to was St Mary Graces. The carrier of the disease was indeed the Black Rat, *Rattus*



# The Wood Hall Moated Manor Project.

## EXCAVATIONS 1991.

The fourth season of excavation at Wood Hall has concentrated on three major areas:

### 1 THE MOAT.

Following the evaluation sections excavated in previous seasons, in 1991 a 30m length of the backfilled moat has been investigated. The backfilling took place in three phases: a) Late Sixteenth Century. At this period demolition rubble from a building close to the moat and causeway was deposited on the north side of the moat, together with everyday objects such as pottery, glassware, and food bone debris. A fishing platform, constructed of stakes driven through the rubble, apparently dates to this period. The periodic cleaning of the moat appears to have ceased at about this time, and weed accumulation and sediments were left uncleared, resulting in rapid peat development. Items lost or thrown away, and preserved in the peat, include pottery, glass, food bone debris, the skulls of dogs and deer, and objects of wood and leather including shoes, eating bowls, and a 2m long eel-fork.

Phase b) Late Eighteenth Century. In this phase massive deposits of household rubbish were tipped into the now stagnant moat. This included pottery and porcelain, bottles and glasses, leather including shoes, and animal bones, together with quantities of building material, including stone, brick and tiles, plaster, window glass and leads. This would indicate building activity or refurbishment in or around 1795-1805.

Phase c) The topmost fills in the moat were deposited between 1805 and 1867, and a garden for the farmhouse existed in this area. Elsewhere on the site the moat remained open and water-filled.

### 2 THE GEORGIAN FARMHOUSE.

Work on the farmhouse has now revealed its full plan, including an internal sub-cellar and well. The primary fill of the well contained parts of the timber windlass and a George III halfpenny of 1806. It was also discovered that the stone-lined drain excavated in the garden area in 1990 was part of an internal drain which ran the full width of the farmhouse in a brick-lined culvert, passing out under the front door. The demolition of the house in 1982 had removed most of the walls at the eastern end; only the sunken 'cool room' remains.

### 3 THE FARMYARD.

Following the removal of the concrete foldyard, the imported building rubble laid as hardcore over the original yard surface was removed by hand. Finds from the rubble included a Second World War German Army belt, which had probably belonged to a P.O.W. from the camp near Selby, assigned to work on the local farm. Removal of the rubble revealed the plan of the farmyard and buildings associated with the Georgian House, including the main barn to the north of the yard, and other buildings associated with farm or domestic work. The yard had gates on its east and west sides; the stone gateposts to the west had been removed, presumably with some difficulty, since those to the east had been smashed to a level below the later concrete yard surface, their stumps being left in place.

### 4 N.W. CORNER OF THE MOATED PLATFORM.

A further excavation (21) was continued in the NW corner of the moated platform, an area that was commenced in 1990. Although there was very little activity in this area after the

moat was dug, except for a number of animal burials, mostly of modern date, excavation of the upcast from the moat, which was dumped over the interior platform, has revealed a sequence of lime-burning hearths, presumably associated with the construction of buildings elsewhere on the site, and a buried soil. Both this soil and the moat upcast contained quantities of pottery dating from the late twelfth/early thirteenth centuries, all originating from production sites in the Doncaster/South Yorkshire area. Post-holes from a substantial timber structure, earlier than the moat, cut the buried soil, which itself sealed a drainage complex containing some shards of early twelfth century date. This is the first evidence of pre-moat medieval activity on the site at Wood Hall.

A scatter of prehistoric flint tools and manufacturing waste has been noted over all the area excavated to date - all have, however, been recovered from contexts disturbed by later activity.

A word of appreciation and thanks must be extended to members of the P&DAS who have participated in this year's excavation. Their valuable contribution, support and loyalty is much appreciated, and without their help our record of achievement in 1991 would certainly have been diminished. To them our thanks.

Simon J Tomson,

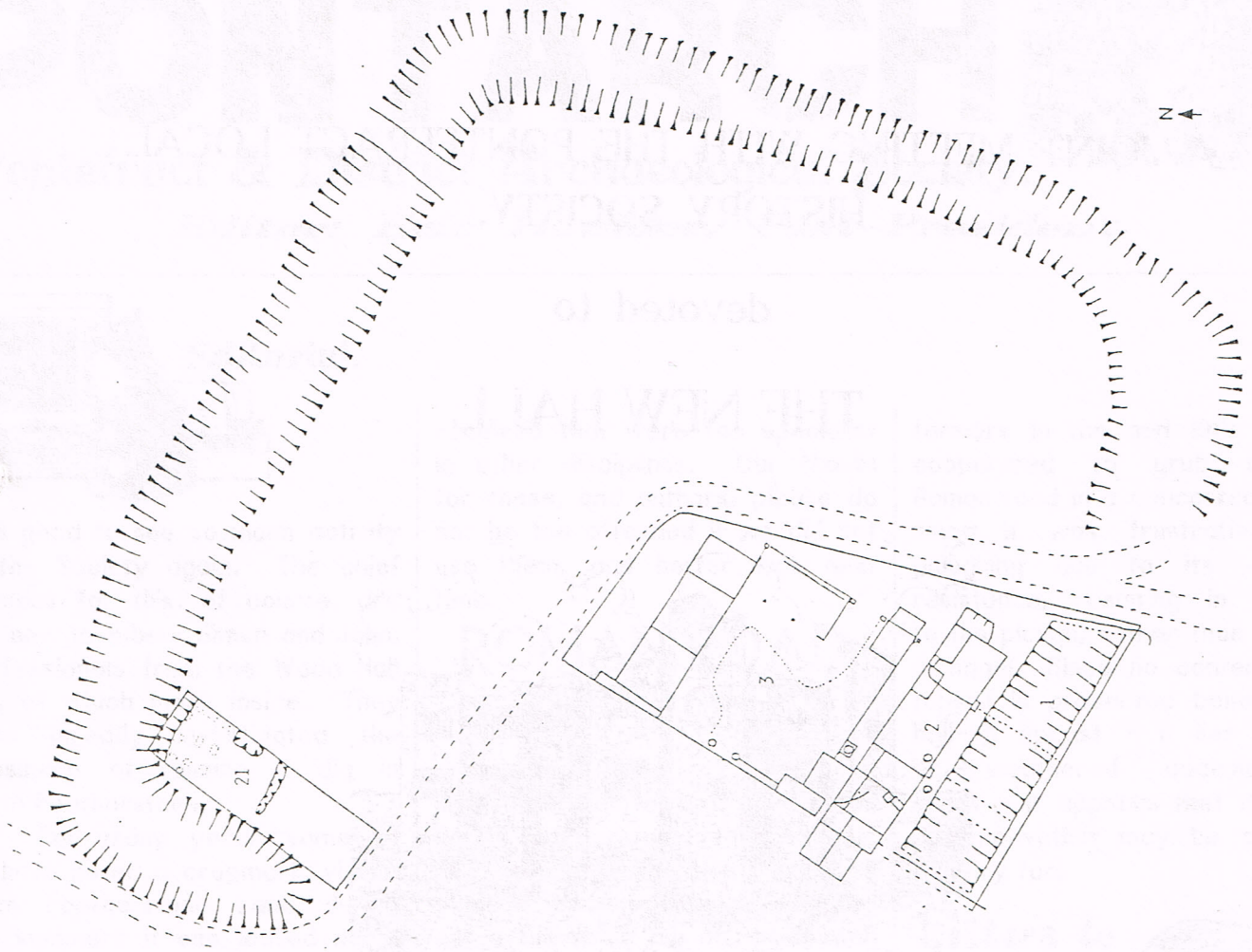
Excavation  
Director.

Vivienne M Metcalf,

Project  
Director.

The above report appears by permission of the Wood Hall Moated Manor Project.

# Wood Hall: Plan of the main platform showing areas currently under Excavation.



## Letters to the Editor, continued from page one.....

...tattus; the infected flea, was, however, XENOPSYLLA CHEOPSIS not PULEX IRRITANS, (human flea) as you state, and the bacterium

...into Britain via the port of Weymouth in a rat-infested wool bale. The hot and humid summer of 1349 is believed to be one of the main causes of the high mortality, providing ideal conditions for the multiplication and spread of the principal vector, the flea. It is also possible that another disease may have been responsible for a general weakening or

predisposition of the population to the three plague varieties: smallpox or typhus for example.

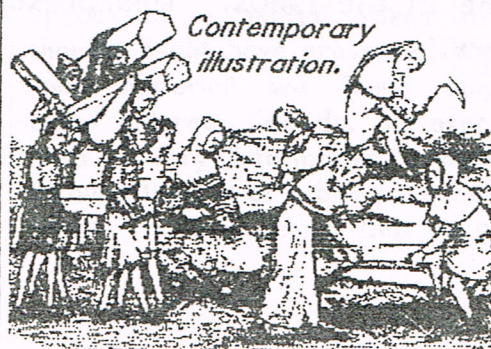
Archaeological finds of Black Rat skeletal material from Roman to Early Medieval contexts illustrate the point that the Black Rat alone was not the carrier, only the infected flea.

Yours faithfully,

Simon Tomson.



it carried was YERSINIA PESTIS. It is believed that the disease was introduced

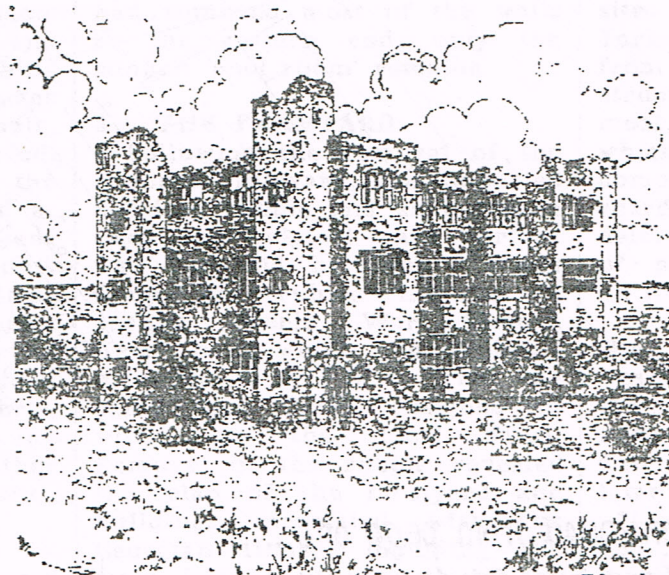


# DO NOT MISS:

A JOINT MEETING WITH THE PONTEFRACT LOCAL  
HISTORY SOCIETY.

devoted to

## THE NEW HALL



Percy Rhodes

by

Mr R Van Riel and Mr J Whitehead.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 29th AT 7-30pm MUSEUM LECTURE ROOM.

This Tudor mansion was a well-known feature of the town until its demolition in the 1960s. This presentation marks its fourth centenary.