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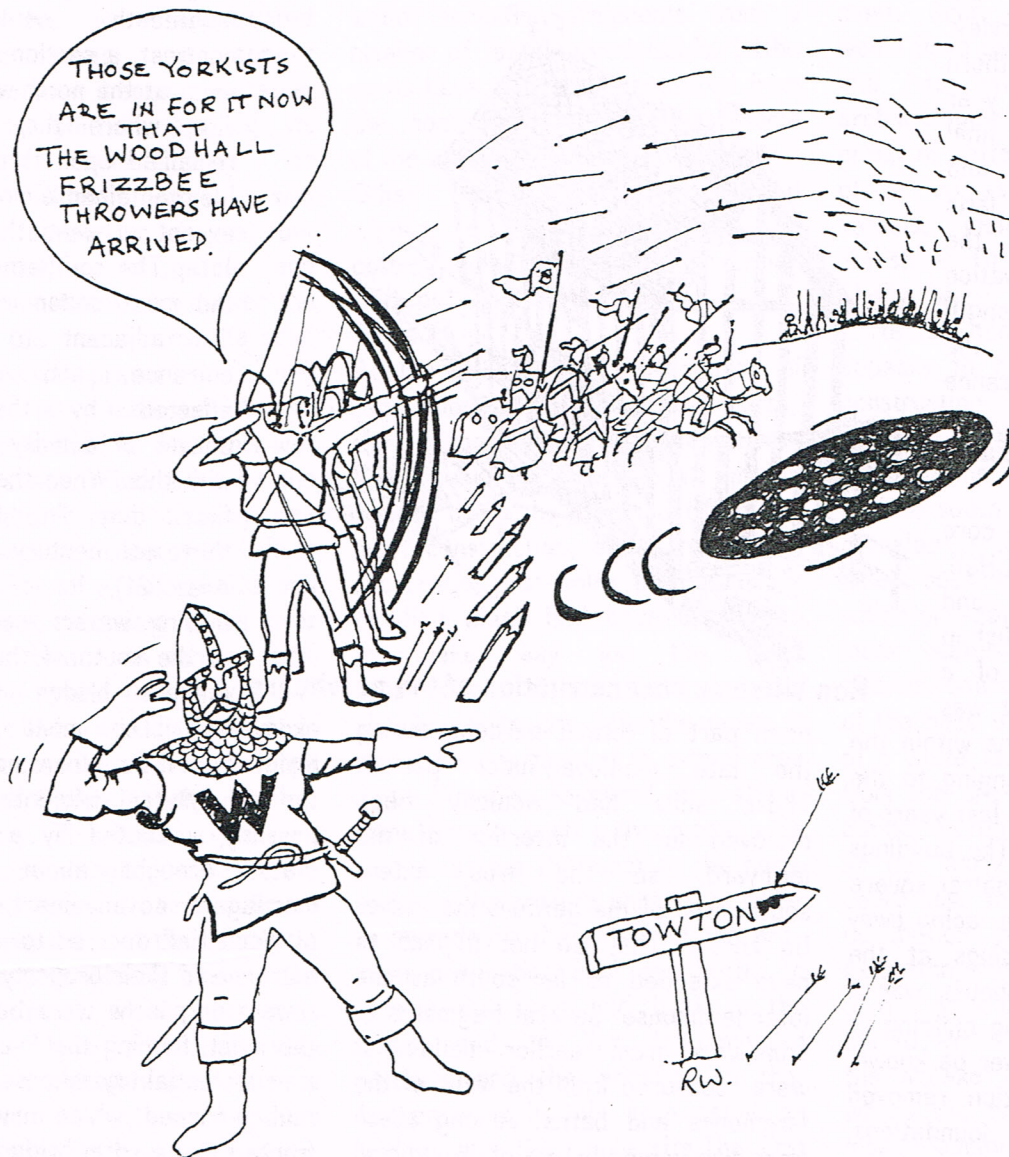
PONTARCH



Pontefract & District Archaeological Society.

Editor: Eric Houlder, Past-President.

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We asked our resident cartoonist/reconstruction artist, Ron Wilson, to draw a topical cartoon.

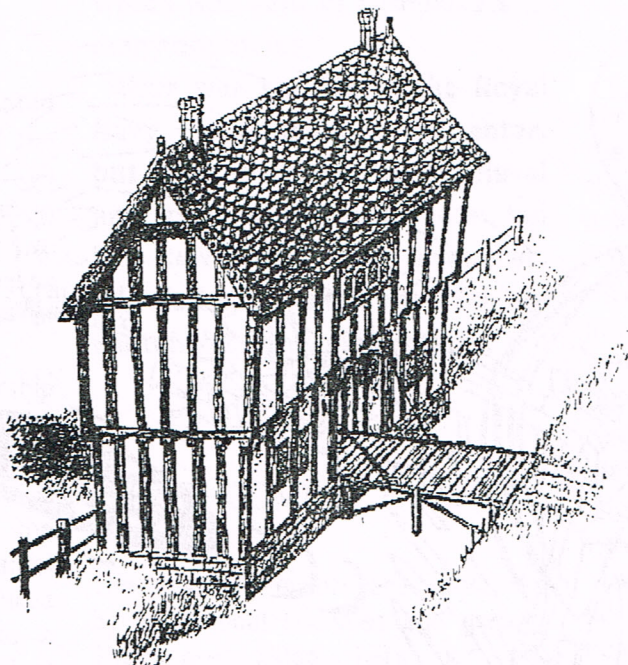
THE WOOD HALL EXCAVATIONS 1992

The Wood Hall Moated Manor Project, sponsored by National Power and undertaken by North Yorkshire County Council, is now in its fifth year. The Project, which is expected to continue until the year 2000, aims to undertake the total excavation of the moated site known as Wood Hall, Womersley; to survey and study in detail the landscape immediately surrounding it; and to put it into its local and regional context by a detailed study of its hinterland, focused on the parish of Womersley. Excavation on the southern area (20) has this year concentrated on the final investigation, recording and removal of the Georgian farm complex, together with the completion of the excavation and recording of a 30m length of the moat, and the investigation of the entrance to the site.

The Georgian Farm Complex.

It now appears that the core of the final farm at Wood Hall, the stone-built house and barns that were demolished in 1982, were typical of a 'model farm' design that was repeated at several farms within the parish, possibly all belonging to the Womersley estate, in the last years of the eighteenth century. The buildings are grouped around a central square farmyard, with the house facing away from the working buildings at the rear. Whether the farmhouse was a remodelling of an existing building or a new construct may never be known, since the final demolition removed most of the walls and foundations, which were in any case very shallow. Only at the extreme western end of the building did any walls survive

above three courses, and these belonged to a later extension. At the eastern end of the building three sunken-floored rooms, probably dairies, also had walls preserved. The dairies had functioned consecutively, each being filled in as its successor came into use. The final, twentieth century dairy was within an eastern extension to the main house. The foundations for the barns were cut into a brown soil that appears to have



Ron Wilson's reconstruction of the gatehouse

been part of formal gardens during the late medieval/Tudor period. These soils had actually been removed for the insertion of the farmyard, so the true extent southwards of the gardens may never be known. They do not appear to have extended as far south as the later farmhouse. Several fragments of stonework from earlier building(s) were recovered from the walls of the farmhouse and barns. Among these were two joining halves of a medieval fireplace architrave. All these fragments, together with the broken

mid-fifteenth century chimney-cap recovered from last year's excavations, indicate the presence of an important medieval building or buildings at Wood Hall.

The Moat.

At the south of the site, excavation of the moat concentrated on completing the 30m length opened in 1991. As expected, a large quantity of high-quality finds was once again recovered, dating from two main periods of deposition - early seventeenth century and late eighteenth century.

In contrast, a section across the moat at the north-west of the site, where the moat had remained open throughout its life, contained almost no finds except twentieth century scrap. The southern section of the moat under investigation lies adjacent to the site entrance, and has been affected by the various phases of activity associated with this. When the moat was first dug in the early thirteenth century (see below Area 21), its clean, gently flowing waters were crossed

at the south of the site by a timber bridge (not yet excavated). The moat itself was maintained in a clean condition. In the mid/late fifteenth century, possibly motivated by a change in status brought about by (e.g.) marriage or advancement, the owners of Wood Hall decided to upgrade the entrance to their property. Two stone towers or plinths were built out into the moat, forming the foundations for a substantial gatehouse, probably timber-framed, which may have been fronted by a drawbridge. This was designed to impress the approaching visitor. The stone plinths, however,

formed an impediment to the free flow of the moat, causing silts and sands to be deposited upstream to the west of the gatehouse, and the eventual formation of peat. These peats were colonised and consolidated by bulrushes. A fishing platform was constructed through the peats, where some luckless fisherman lost his eel-fork, probably in the early sixteenth century. Other finds accumulated within the peats at this period, including pottery, leather, glass and a large quantity of deer bones. The footings of the gatehouse, though massive, were constructed within the moat and appear eventually to have become unstable. The building shifted, causing its collapse or necessitating its demolition. Some stone was undoubtedly saved for re-use, but massive quantities of rubble and debris were pushed forward over the bridge into the moat, forming a solid causeway which preserved, almost intact, the late medieval bridge which had preceded it. That this was a deliberate act is indicated by the fact that the bridge decking was removed, and a corduroy of silver birch branches, of a uniform size and cut to length, was laid down over part of the bridge to form a firm basis for the rubble causeway. Much household rubbish was disposed of in the same operation, including large quantities of Cistercian and Humber Ware pottery. The finds suggest an early-mid seventeenth century date for the demolition of the gatehouse and the construction of the causeway. The causeway completely blocked the flow of the moat, which must as a consequence have silted up very quickly - and probably become very smelly! One 're-cut' or vigorous cleaning appears to have taken place, possibly in the early-mid eighteenth century, leaving the channel half its

original width. After this the moat was again allowed to silt up, and rushes to grow, until at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and presumably contemporarily with the building of the Georgian farmhouse, a final tipping of domestic, farm and general refuse took place before soil was imported to level up for the farmhouse garden. Finds from the moat have again been of high quality, and have included leather (shoes, part of a fine decorated glove, and an arrow spacer similar to those recovered from the *Mary Rose*) and wood, including fragments from a number of lathe-turned bowls. Lathe cores have also been recovered from the moat, indicated that least some of the bowls were made at Wood Hall. Other finds include vessel and window glass, and quantities of pottery including complete Cistercian ware bung-hole vessel.²)

Area 21

At the end of the 1991 season of excavations Area 21, at the north-west corner of the moated platform, had revealed a pre-moat ground surface buried by the upcast from the moat construction, and a number of substantial post-holes from a timber building which had been dismantled to make way for the moat construction. Other features were also known to pre-date the moat. It was therefore decided to extend area 21 by 5 metres eastward, and at the same time to push a five metre wide section across the moat to the north and into the pasture annexe, in order to investigate the extent of the pre-moat occupation east and north; to section the moat and bank to the north; and to link the moated platform and the annexe, so that further work in this area could be tied in with the whole site. The first phase of the excavation on area 21 included the removal of a number of

animal burials - mostly nineteenth century pig burials, though two adult horse burials located close to the moat in the north of the site may well be eighteenth century in date. Following this the upcast was carefully removed to reveal a brown layer apparently overlying the buried ground surface. This layer, which contained large quantities of pottery, animal bone and limestone blocks and fragments as well as the remains of a hearth, appears to have been associated with a building or shelter used during the construction of the moat. Such a temporary building would have been ephemeral in nature and has left little trace in the archaeological record. The large group of pottery associated with this phase comes from a number of vessels, including Hallgate type, Yorkshire Gritty wares and some Shelly ware, of late twelfth/early thirteenth century date. This pottery appears to be associated with the construction of the moat. The removal of the upcast and further investigation of the buried ground surface south of the moat has so far revealed a total of eighteen post-holes, possibly forming two buildings, which pre-date the moat. Other pre-moat features include two small ditches, one of which contained most of the base of a pottery vessel made of a white fabric which is paralleled from the pre-timber castle levels at Sandal Castle, Wakefield, with a date in the early twelfth century. This could have implications for the early occupation of Wood Hall, and, by extension, the clearance and draining of this area of lowland Yorkshire. The buried ground surface continues in the annexe to the north, surviving where the bank formed by periodic moat cleanings has preserved it, but has so far revealed no trace of occupation in this area. Evidence of

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pre-medieval activity continues to occur at Wood Hall. This includes Mesolithic and Neolithic flints and a fragment of Neolithic saddle-quern, all residual in later disturbances; sherds from two vessels of Iron Age pottery, stratified in the fill of the second (earlier) small ditch on area 21; and three sherds of Romano-British pottery and a coin of the House of Constantine, all residual in later contexts.

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THE BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARDS.

National Power had been nominated for the Sponsorship Award, for the best sponsor ship of an archaeological project either ongoing or completed within the last two years. Entrants included Wessex Water, British Coal Opencast, and B. P. Exploration.

The winners of the Sponsorship Award were B.P.Exploration, for the Wytch Farm Project centred on Poole in Dorset. This project, which is now completed, involved the archaeological and environmental survey and interpretation of an area of dorset heathland adjacent to a new oilfield. The Wood Hall Project came second.

Other award winners were:

The Pitt Rivers Award: Monmouth Arch.Soc.

The Virgin Group Award: Peat Moors Visitor Centre.

Heritage in Britain Award: Glamorgan-Gwent Arch.Trust.

Channel Four Award: Down to Earth.

B.P. Award (for chance finds): Michael Banham.

Archaeologist of the Year (Nationwide Silver Trowel Award):

Francis Prior, for the Flag Fen Project.

Grace Bucknill (11) of Tollerton, York, was runner-up in the Young Archaeologists Club Award, sponsored by Yorkshire Television.

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LEN SUTTON.

We regret to announce the death of member Len Sutton, aged 65. Len was world-famous for his reproduction armour which was sold to enthusiasts in many countries.

After war service in the Royal Navy, he became a carpenter, but his enthusiasm for medieval and post-medieval armour led to a new career as an armourer. He died on September 19th, in Pontefract General Infirmary.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

The following events are sponsored by other local societies and groups. They are listed here for the convenience of Members of the P&DAS.

THE CBA(4) SYMPOSIUM.

This annual event is the highlight of the northern archaeological year, and all members should make a point of attending at least once. In 1993 one of the speakers is our own Simon Tomson, reporting on the recent work in Castle Chain. Members may also recognise their Editor, who takes charge of the projection box each year.

The Symposium takes place in the

lecture theatre at Leeds City Art Gallery, on February 6th, beginning at 11 am. There is a small admission fee, payable in advance, or at the door. Cafe facilities are available.

WAKEFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

This new society is being addressed by Mr Houlder of this Society on February 18th at 7-30 in Wakefield Museum. Subject: *The Sutton Hood Ship Burials.*

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EDITORIAL

The Committee of the Society, and the Editorial staff of *PontArch* take this opportunity to wish all members a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year in 1993.

The Editor is pleased that quite a lot of material is in the folder for future issues of this newsletter. Unfortunately, his professional responsibilities are such that he has little or no time to key the material onto the floppy discs ready for typesetting.

Do we have a member who would like to undertake this task? The Editorial computer will accept both 3" and 3½" discs, in either PCW 180k or MsDos 730k format. Please volunteer if you think you can help, and help the Editor to avoid staring at a screen all Christmas!

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