



The Markenfield Irregular

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A NASTY SURPRISE. It had never crossed Markenfield's mind that it might one day be approached by a specialist land agent wishing to acquire a substantial field in the centre of the Estate, to develop a solar panel farm. The land concerned is directly opposite the Dutch Barn on the drive and could have been either 18 or 34 acres, which would then be covered by many hundreds of identical solar panels, all leaning the same way and with the ancient farm land beneath deliberately rendered sterile. The agent's letter included a list of all the special designations of land which would have made such a solar farm impossible, such as proximity to anything of historic or of environmental importance. As Markenfield farmland was apparently none of these things and was indeed nothing special, he did not foresee planning problems.



The reply was Thank you but no thank you. That should have been the end of the matter; but one must not forget the Government's determined drive to switch from fossil fuels to the renewable, such as wind and sunlight, in order to fulfil its massive undertakings to Brussels. Unknown to Markenfield at the time, in 2004 Harrogate Borough Council mounted a District Landscape Character Assessment which concluded that the land to the South of the main drive was of little importance and, by implication, ripe for better things than farming. The report itself, when Markenfield finally saw it, included photos of that land of the utmost dullness with no mention of its importance. HBC of course, under certain circumstances, can acquire powers of compulsory purchase. When asked how were these tendentious photos taken, HBC replied that they did not by law need the owners' permission to venture onto the land to take them. It appears also they felt no obligation of simple good manners to let them know.

Markenfield has, for several years, been engaged in a drive to include its 600 acres within the protected Buffer Zone of Fountains Abbey, with which it was intimately linked for centuries, as well as be included in the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which we lie outside only by a field or two. Our case for such inclusion is far stronger over the land to the North of the Hall, from which one cannot see another house, than to the South. But a large chunk taken centrally from the ancient estate and farm would markedly weaken our long-term aim to set up a constitutional structure which will protect Markenfield over the coming decades and generations.



OUR OPEN DAYS in 2016 will be:

April 30th to May 15th and 11th to 26th June.

There will continue to be Guided Tours by appointment,
which in 2015 numbered over 70.

CHRISTMAS AT MARKENFIELD, our annual Carol Service held in the Great Hall to raise funds for a local charity, this winter raised £1,756 for Lister House, Ripon's Royal British Legion Care Home.

THE CHAPEL continues to attract some fascinating things, from the eighteenth century altar table lent by Ripon Cathedral when we re-opened on the present basis in 2001, with its original frontal, to the "fair white linen cloth" of Maltese lace which covers it periodically, and some moving objects described in IRREGULAR 29 - including a fragment of the original altar stone, bearing one of its carved consecration crosses, deliberately smashed up at the Reformation.



Now they are joined by a 6 ½" figure of the Angel Gabriel, holding in his L hand a scroll by which his words to the Blessed Virgin Mary - that she is to bear a son - are symbolised. The other half of this story - the figure of the BVM receiving the news - is missing. It is a scene beloved by painters over the centuries and often shown on a grand scale. Here it is elegantly simple. Like another figure behind the altar at Markenfield, it was found in an open-air, bric-a-brac market in Western France. One wonders how many treasures are yet to be found in such places.

IRREGULAR 29 also had some account of the organ which it was thought used to live in the Chapel, in very poor condition. We are now in touch with Julian Berkeley who saved and now owns it and he writes as follows:

"When Johnny [the 7th Lord Grantley] asked me to examine the organ, it stood on its own in the Great Hall. There was no other furniture in the house and it was in a truly shocking state. I think that vandals must at some time managed to get into the unoccupied building and, there being nothing else to amuse them, they simply decided to take a wallop at the organ. A number of the soft lead pipes were damaged beyond repair. Pigeons had got into the Hall and contributed to the accumulated dust and dirt of many decades,

"I think it likely that at the time the organ found its way to Markenfield, the Great Hall was used for domestic entertainment [by the Foster family, the tenant farmers, who then occupied the whole of the house]. Many large country houses were equipped with chamber organs, harpsichords and, later, grand pianos, and whilst the latter would have easily have found homes when the house was emptied, the organ presented more of a challenge and was simply left in situ."

It is thought it was probably made in the 1820s. Julian had it meticulously repaired and it now lives in his house in Hampshire. He sent us a tape of its being played on BBC-Radio 3. On its arrival at Markenfield this recording was played in the Great Hall, which heard its soft, rather melancholy tones once more for the first time in many decades.

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF ACTUARIES recently came for a Guided Tour. They were particularly impressed that every penny raised goes on the continuing restoration and keeping the old house going - so much so that, a few days later, in addition to their entrance fee, they sent a cheque for £500. Markenfield is deeply grateful.