



The Markenfield Irregular

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OTTO THE OTTER is a character we earnestly wish had never become part of the Markenfield story.

We first became aware that something was badly wrong when three or four large dead



fish were found nightly on the banks of the moat, partly brutally eaten and then discarded. They were descendants of Koi Carp and Tench that the Tenant Farmer's son had introduced to the waters a few years ago when a few inches long, and had grown to the size of a goodly Salmon. First thoughts were that the culprit was a Fox. Then perhaps a Mink. It was clear that the brute, whoever he was, would visit two or three nights running, gorge himself, and then pause for a few nights to recover before returning. Ducks and the new ducklings also began to disappear, leaving only a trace of bloody feathers. It was clear the murderer only came at night. But who was he?

Most distressingly, one of the famous pair of Markenfield Black Swans was the next victim, savaged in the water from below. His horribly mutilated remains were found floating in the moat the next day. Roland had been an elegant and trusting creature. He and Sylvia would silently patrol the moat at night. In the winter, when lights started to come on in the house as it awoke at 6:00am, they would both give their long, soft, deep hoot; as if calling out to whoever had put on the light: "all's well."

Roland's widow, Sylvia, was taken to a place of safety - a special wildlife park. A camera was borrowed which would come on at night only when it sensed movement. It was fixed in the orchard facing the moat. It was astonishing to discover just how much life crammed into the orchard when the world was asleep: deer, fox, hares, rabbits, water-rats taking a mudbath and what looked very like badgers. And there, in the foreground, was a three-and-a-half-foot Otter - teeth glinting in the moonlight.

The Otter is, of course, a Protected Species. At one point, it was thought there were only 2,000 left in the country. They must not be harmed, or frightened, or made mockery of; even to stick your tongue out at an Otter could land you in jail. So how to drive him off? They have to eat the equivalent of 60 beefburgers a day to survive. To the naïve question put to Natural England - suppose we brought in four attractive lady Otters to distract him, would he stop killing? - we were told that the first thing he would do is eat *them*.

Then advice came that Markenfield should procure some Otter *spraint*, which has a unique smell. Otto would smell it and say to himself "oh this is another chap's patch" and push off. The search for this matter proceeded apace but after two months of search, none had been found. The number of dead ducks meantime shrank, and finally ceased. After two months it was felt Otto might have gone.



A decision was taken to bring Sylvia back, even though one could not be certain. She was returned, with a young gentleman admirer she had got to know while in exile. After initial nervousness, they now patrol the moat together as she and Roland used to.

When tragedy first struck a lady emailed Markenfield: "I always loved the Black Swans and thought they gave your lovely Hall such an air of

peace and grandeur". Well, now that peace and grandeur have returned - let us hope, for good.

"SYD SADDYL" When Professor Robert Bartlett was here to give The Friends of Markenfield his brilliant talk *Why can the Dead do such Great Things?* he told us he had come across the earliest recorded use of the word "side-saddle" in 1493 and that it involved a Markenfield. Looking up the reference he gave, it was found in a curious little roll of accounts written on a scrap of paper just 8" by 4", part of the archive of the Dean and Chapter of Ripon, and read (in part translation) "paid to William Burton for mending *unius syd saddyl quae fuit dominae Markynfeld 5d* - one side saddle which belonged to Lady Markenfield 5 pence". This would have been Elenor née Conyers of Hornby Castle (wife of Sir Thomas Markenfield) who died in 1498, whose rather battered recumbent figure lies on their tomb in the North transept of the Cathedral and who would certainly have been present in our Chapel at the marriage of her sister in law Anne on 21 November 1487.

THE HAWSKSWORTH FAMILY were tenants at Markenfield from 1791 to the 1840s. Dr Brian Crosse, who has been the source of a vast array of Markenfield information over the years, has drawn the Irregular's attention to a little known but moving grave of one member of that family who died in 1825 aged only 28. It is to be found in the churchyard of the *old* Bishop Thornton church, abandoned in the nineteenth century and now a lonely and atmospheric spot. She died while mixing Yorkshire puddings before her husband and family returned from church. The little image on her tombstone shows her wiping her brow with fever and pointing to the clock which has stopped at 11:30am, the time of her death. The kitchen then is the Undercroft now as one enters. It still has its hooks in the ceiling to hang hams and other dried meat, and it was here that this tragedy must have taken place.

MARKENFIELD is honoured by the forthcoming visit of The Bishop of London, the Rt Rev'd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres, on Friday 8 July, to celebrate Holy Communion at 6:00pm. Bishop Chartres is among the most powerful and significant figures in the Church of England in its present turmoil and a tower of strength for many. His recent conducting of the Service of Thanksgiving for The Queen's birthday in St Paul's Cathedral, his annual presiding at the Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph and many other national occasions, remind us how lucky we are to have a leader of such stature who has retained such a splendid sense of humour.

