



The Markenfield Irregular

Issue thirty-seven Summer 2018



It is with the greatest sadness that we mark the death of Viscount Norwich, the historian and campaigner, who has been such a powerful and effective friend of Markenfield. Always known as John Julius Norwich, he was held in great affection by all who knew him. His erudition was matched with great charm and sense of humour, all of which made his company a delight.

Equally attractive was his enthusiasm for the causes he espoused, for which he always found time in spite of labour for his 23 books ranging from across a wide range of the history of some of our civilisation's landmarks, including Venice, Byzantium, Shakespeare, the Popes and Sicily, all intensely readable. On top of this he still found time to be a very active Founder-Chairman of the Venice in Peril Fund, The World Monuments Fund, the Executive Council of the National Trust, The Board of English National Opera and many other splendid institutions.

So it was not with a great deal of hope that the Curteises, who had known him for some years, told him that The Friends of Markenfield was being formed and what its purpose would be. Would he consider helping in some way? "Yes!" he replied immediately. "We don't suppose" they went on "that you would allow your name to go forward for possible election as its first President?" "Yes, yes" he cried "I love the place". He was of course as good as his word. At the meeting in the Great Hall officially to found The Friends in December 2007, he made a speech of such infectious and knowledgeable enthusiasm that his listeners were bowled over and The Friends got off to a tremendous start.

Since that evening he has often been an invisible but invaluable friend. A phone call to him in London about a problem here, or seeking advice would often result in his putting one onto the right person in Whitehall or in one of his organisations or offering to intervene himself. His unique knowledge of our Built Heritage and his total dedication have enriched Markenfield.

HEDGEHOGS may vanish from Great Britain in less than ten years, we are warned by The Times. The excessive use of pesticides is to blame plus the lack of suitable gardens and foliage as well as predation by badgers and being run over by human beings on country roads. Certainly far fewer are now seen at Markenfield. One in particular, clearly a grandfather, and christened Mogg, could be seen on summer evenings ponderously crossing the wooden bridge to the orchard, but he too eventually disappeared, believed drowned in the moat. (Hedgehogs cannot swim).

An appeal went out a few years ago from the British Hedgehog Preservation Society seeking good homes for some in their care. Naturally Markenfield responded offering sanctuary, and in reply a letter was received stating that a Hedgehog Inspector would be calling to see if the place was up to hedgehog standards. It was so worded that it gave the impression the inspector was likely to be a large hedgehog wearing pince-nez and carrying a clipboard and biro with which to tick boxes.

In fact it was a perfectly charming lady who was full of praise for the offer of a safe haven for their refugees and who inspected the gardens within the moat as well as the 17 acres of Spring Wood most carefully. She then wrote to say, regrettably, Markenfield was not up to required standards, partly because of the danger of the moat and partly because Spring Wood can dry out completely in summer which would lead to death by dehydration.

There the matter rested until recently. Giles, the Head Gardener and Garden Designer, hearing laments that Markenfield could do nothing to halt the national decline, responded "Of course you have hedgehogs! I heard them snoring this morning and found one of their nests". Hedgehogs' snoring seemed as unlikely a story as could be imagined, but he indicated where the particular nest was. It is half-hidden behind a thick shrub, beautifully constructed with roof of thatched dry leaves, a perfect little house. It is possible that there could be many such hidden dwellings, each housing a growing hedgehog family. No snoring was heard on that occasion, but the concept was Googled up and there, astonishingly, is a snoring hedgehog. Little music is to be heard in a snore but somehow, mysteriously, there seemed to be a mystical hint of quiet animal triumph.



OVERHEAD CABLES and the tall posts that support them are one of the most objectionable eyesores on an ancient site. That is why the decision to bury 165 yards of overhead BT cable underground and remove the offensive posts was so welcomed.

The stretch concerned is right next to the NE section of the Park Pale, the mediaeval wall Scheduled as an Ancient Monument, which forms the boundary of Markenfield's 128 acre deer park. The drystone wallers from Nidderdale AONB, who have been slowly reconstituting some of it under the watchful eye of Historic England (formerly English Heritage), spotted that the telephone wires had become almost irretrievably tangled with the tall thick trees here and that if any branch were to come down in a high wind Markenfield's communication systems could be severed for weeks.

Giles negotiated with BT and agreed that if BT supplied the special cable, Markenfield would trench, bury it and back-fill (which would take a day), and BT would join old and new (less than an hour) and remove the redundant cable. The result of this cooperation is a huge improvement and it is hoped the idea could be repeated elsewhere.



Visitors to the Chapel sometimes ask about the memorial to the 7th Lord Grantley, Lady Deirdre's first husband. He was awarded the Military Cross for his courage at the Battle of Anzio in Italy in 1944, when he was 20. What, we are asked, did he do to win such a remarkable distinction?

Here is his citation for the award of his MC. He had not then succeeded to the title, so he is referred to by his surname of Norton. Had he not died in 1995, he would have been 95 this July.

LIEUTENANT THE HON. J.R.B. NORTON.
GRENADIER GUARDS.
M.C.

This officer has, throughout the period from 25th January to 10th February 1944 in operations on the ANZIO beachhead shown the highest qualities of leadership, courage and tenacity of purpose.

On 25th January, No. 4 Company was detailed to attack the factory at CARROCETO. Lieut. Norton was commanding a platoon of this Company. Almost immediately his 38 Set failed and he was out of communication with this Company Commander. Acting on his own initiative, he led his platoon on to the objective and then started to clear up the area in which several Germans still remained. He took these prisoner and consolidated his positions in this area, thereby making possible for the rest of the Company to come up and hold the ground gained.

On the night of 3/4 February he was sent on patrol to secure an identification from the German lines. He took the dozen men with him forward to get round a German post, assaulted it and brought back two German prisoners, whose identification was of the utmost value.

During the period, he has taken numerous other patrols, the results of which have been of great value.

On the afternoon of 10th February, Lieut. Norton was ordered with a party of thirty men, to endeavour to reoccupy the Station at CARROCETO as it was suspected that the enemy had withdrawn. He had led his platoon almost into the building when he was fired upon from different directions by three M.G.s and by a tank. Lieut. Norton immediately disposed his party in fire positions, and returned the fire, while he himself with great calmness informed his Battalion Headquarters of the situation on the wireless, and asked for further orders.

When ordered to withdraw, he collected his men with such skill from their positions that, although the way back was under enemy observation and fire, only three casualties were incurred.

His coolness and bearing have throughout inspired the utmost confidence of the troops under his command, and he has set an extremely high standard of junior leadership. I recommend that his constant courage, determination and efficiency be recognised by the award of a Military Cross.



The Friends of Markenfield

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JOHN JULIUS NORWICH You will have read above about the sad news of the death of our President, John Julius Norwich.



It was quite a shock, as he had attended our AGM only 7 weeks previously, when he gave us an excellent talk on his last book 'France – from Gaul to de Gaulle'. Although 88, he was in good form, and, as always, his talk was very entertaining. Speaking to him a couple of years ago, he remarked 'I wouldn't mind if I died tomorrow as I have had such a wonderful life', a statement I have not forgotten and which sent me to find his autobiography 'Trying to Please'. I strongly recommend it as he did, indeed, have a wonderful, eventful and interesting life.



EVENTS The talk on 'The Georgians and the Pursuit of Pleasure' from Hannah Phillip was well illustrated and fascinating and came with a 'trigger warning' of the risqué content. Fortunately no-one collapsed from shock/horror.



Hannah has been director of Fairfax House now for 9 years, and has overseen its development and expansion to become a major historical attraction for York. The visit to Fairfax House with a private tour was also excellent and culminated in a viewing of the Grantley Salts. This set of 6 silver salt cellars, in the form of a scallop shell being held by a 'Moor' (as on the coat of arms), was commissioned by the 3rd Lord Grantley in 1824. They are very beautiful and remarkably heavy and as they are not normally on display, we really appreciated that they were brought out especially for us.



NEXT EVENT Friday 6th July, Cristina Figueredo tells us about 16th century Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with particular reference to Sir Thomas Markenfield who went in 1566 and while there he became a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre. She is an excellent speaker and this promises to be a very interesting talk.

BOOKING We now have the online system for bookings up and running and, despite a few minor hiccups, it is working very well. It is certainly much easier now to book for events, saving you having to write a cheque and post it and saving us have to get to the bank with it!

PROJECTS The latest Project to be undertaken by The Friends, is exploratory research into whether there are sufficient grounds to apply to Historic England (English Heritage) for the Mediaeval Deer Park surrounding Markenfield to be registered as a Historic Park & Garden; and to establish what drawbacks there might be to this. This would give the immediate area around the Hall the same status as the house, as being on that Register is the land-equivalent of Listing a building.