



# *The Markenfield Irregular*

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SHEEP are a welcome sight at Markenfield. It has been ten years since they were last here. The reason for their return however is practical rather than pastoral. With the exceptional amount of rain we have had this autumn, the fields on the 600 acres of the Estate have become drenched and sodden meaning the heavy cattle were sinking in several inches, which had the effect that they were tending to pull the grass up by its roots as they ate, which is bad in the long run as it slowly denudes the pasture.



The cows are now under cover for the winter, and our wise tenant farmer Andrew has brought in a flock of 100 sheep who will be outside for the winter. They are much lighter of course, and tend to crop quietly rather than bodily pull grass up - far better for the grassland.

PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR are coming along at great pace - talks, concerts, Chapel services and the like; plus two new ventures. One, a brain-child of the Historic Houses Association called Invitation to View, consists in our case of eight dates when a rather special and personal tour will take place including parts of the house not normally seen and followed by a superior afternoon tea; the other Peace of Mind through Mindfulness will be a series of Saturday courses devoted to reducing the Impact of Stress and Anxiety, taken by two leading Counsellors, experts in such matters.

OPEN DAYS next year will be May 3 to 17 and June 14 to 28. These, as with all our events, are to help the enjoyment of unique Markenfield, but also to raise essential funds to keep the old place going and to continue its vital restoration.



SWAN SONG. Black Swans first came to Markenfield in 1982, when Peter Olney, Curator of Birds at London Zoo, gave a pair to Lady Deirdre and her then husband Lord Grantley, as a housewarming present when they commenced the monumental task of the restoration of Markenfield - a task which continues to this day. The swans themselves almost immediately looked completely at home; visitors loved the feeling that they had always been there.

Then, in 2015, disaster struck. Several large fish from the moat were found with a bite taken out and then discarded. Ducks and new ducklings had begun to disappear, leaving only a trace of bloody feathers. A trail camera eventually identified the culprit: a visiting three-and-a-half-foot dog-Otter. He clearly did not live here or he would have been seen but Otters can travel overland at night for up to ten miles if a good

meal awaits. Otters are, of course, a protected species and nothing must be done to rid oneself of them. Natural England is fierce in their defence.

Tragically, the next victim was one of the Black Swans, savaged in the water from below. Her distraught mate had to be sent off to a safe haven. Five years of seeming tranquillity followed, during which it was hoped the villain had become bored and moved to pastures new, and a new pair was introduced. Within six months, one had been savaged to death. A further young pair was acquired, yet only three days later one was found horribly mutilated. The decision was most reluctantly taken that, after 37 years, Black Swans could no longer live here; it is too cruel.

The survivor of this last pair was terrified, would not eat and was clearly slowly starving. As this is written, she is being captured and found a new and (hopefully) safe home. One lady has written to Markenfield "I always loved the Black Swans and thought they gave your lovely Hall such an air of peace and grandeur". And so they did, so they did, but alas!... no more.



EAST BARN repairs were completed during the autumn. Readers of **Irregular 38** will recall the extensive storm damage suffered by the stone roof of this remarkable, Listed, large, high sixteenth century stone structure, the first part of Markenfield to be seen as one comes up the one-mile-long drive.

A survey soon discovered that the damage was more serious even than at first realised, and needed immediate attention if it was not to deteriorate, using the original oak beams which were in sound condition, and the massive rough Yorkshire stone tiles known as "slates". The

cost of these vital repairs was eventually £75,169; and it was impossible to see how such a sum could be raised for an essentially unused building, but raised it had to be, as repair was mandatory by law because the barn is Listed.



Our bacon was saved by a most generous grant of £50,000 from the Historic Houses Foundation (Chairman Mr Norman Hudson). This remarkable but little-known charity has been the key to the salvation of many fine buildings, the story of which can be found on its website. Finding this grant and fearing worse damage unless action was taken immediately was a nightmare, but the satisfaction of seeing it completed and knowing the barn was now safe and sound for the next few hundred years far outweighed the sleepless nights it had stirred up.

CONSERVATION WORK to the Great Hall and the Undercroft following June's "ingress of water" is nearing an end. We were finally given the go ahead to replace the Great Hall's floorboards at the beginning of September - they had been up and down all summer for a mixture of weddings, lectures and concerts - and it was a relief to have a semblance of normality, even if it wasn't going to last long.

Thankfully the insurers funded new flooring, as seagrass does not react well to moisture. The original seagrass, fitted in 2005, used to 'grow' each summer - apparently in accordance with rising humidity levels - and there would be a hump in the centre of the room.

New seagrass was laid at the end of October, necessitating the removal of small items into the Chapel and the dust sheeting of anything too big to remove - including the oak bookcases, which looked as if they'd been wrapped for Christmas.



Once the new flooring had been laid, the process of returning items from the conservators' studios began. First to return were the books and painting - both of which took direct hits from the rain water as it cascaded over the top of the internal gutter. The books looked as if they'd never seen a drop of water, and the paintings had been sympathetically cleaned - allowing us to see them with clarity that had not been possible for probably a hundred years. Putting everything back seemed a lot simpler than packing it in the first place, and within an hour the Great Hall was starting to look more as it should.

And so with the Beechey portrait of 3rd Lady Grantley, and the two other Norton portraits, restored and re-hung over the fireplace, Markenfield can begin to put this little slice of its history behind it. There are still a number of items to be returned, and the Undercroft needs a new coat of lime wash, but the floorboards can stay put and the house can return to its benign and tranquil self - just in time for Christmas at Markenfield.



# The Venice in Peril Fund

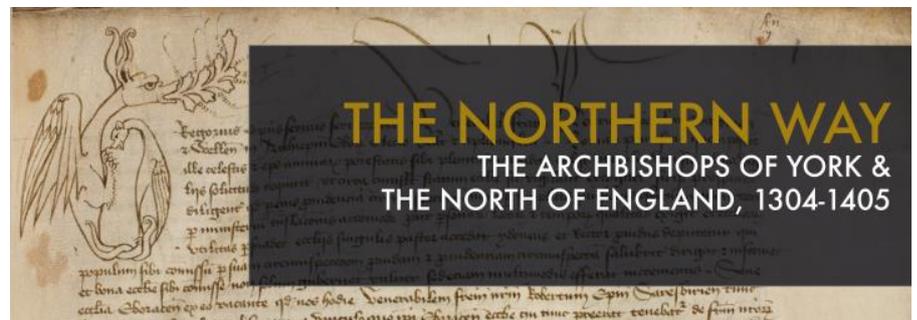
The British Committee for the Preservation of Venice



WE WOULD LIKE to thank The Friends, who took on the organisation of Christmas at Markenfield this year, and raised just over £1,500 for the John Julius Norwich Memorial fund in aid of Venice in Peril.

MARKENFIELD OFTEN BENEFITS from chance encounters and coincidental discoveries, and this year was no exception. Following a guided tour in September a lady introduced herself as "Sarah, from York University" - she turned out to be Sarah Rees Jones, Professor of Medieval History and director of the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of York. As our Guide said "I'm so glad you waited until after the tour to tell me that...". Prof Rees Jones proceeded to tell us about a project she is working on, called The Northern Way, one that she thought the Hall might be interested in:

The 14th century was a formative period in the development of both the North of England, and the kingdom of England, as discreet political-cultural entities - it was also the time when Canon John de Markenfield rose to power and completed the Hall you see today. It was a time when the Church provided active leadership in war, and when York's Archbishops held political sway, as well as being extensively engaged in pastoral reform. The Archbishops' Registers recorded the business and formal acts of the Archbishop of York, documenting the government of the Church, the management and staffing of parishes, and the Church's oversight and regulation of the moral and spiritual conduct of the people of Yorkshire, Northern England and beyond.



The Registers cover the period between 1225 and 1650, but The Northern Way will focus exclusively on the period between 1304 and 1405. Some images of the folios, outside the project's scope, are available via 'York's Archbishops' Registers Revealed' website; yet the majority have not been published. Those that have are in Latin, and so inaccessible to the majority. The project aims to digitise all 17,000 folios, from the year 1306 to 1406, by photographing each page to a very high resolution and making them available online. The individual pages will not be transcribed in their entirety, rather a summary will be provided for each one. This will create a searchable calendar, likened to an index, which will allow individuals access to the topics and themes etc; however if a page is of interest to an individual they would still need to translate the full text.

Eight mentions of Canon John de Markenfield have so far come to light, including "*Certification to the pope, having received his letter, that John de Markenfield, canon of York, and John Fraunceys, clerk, had been cited by Henry Willelmi of Ardsley, notary public, to appear before the pope.*" We are excited to see what other references the project turns up, and the Research & Archive Group hope to become more involved when they attend a workshop at York University next March.