The Archaeology of Harewood Castle – Ed Dennison
Richard III Society Yorkshire Branch Spring Lecture 2006

In 1985 I rode a motorcycle to work and every morning I took the route along the A61 up the hill, around the bend towards Leeds. And every evening I rode back around the bend and down the hill towards home. And never did I know there was a castle just metres away. Trees I saw, a view across the valley I saw, but never a castle. So this year's lecture, about the castle that is there was a revelation for me anyhow.

Constructed in the second half of the 14th Century, this castle was built on the side of the hill. Why the side, not the top? You'd think you'd want to be on the top so you could do the whole bestriding the world like a colossus thing, but no. The trick was to build it up the side, so the hill made a backdrop to your castle, making it look shiny and pretty to those who you wanted to impress in the whole "my castle is better than your castle" game.

Of course this whole building on a hillside fad made life a nightmare for the builders, and will do the same again now for those who want to keep this fine building from tumbling down the aforementioned hill.

But I'm getting ahead of myself (must be the revelation that all those grubby little boys who had stood on a hillock top declaring "I'm the King of the Castle and you're the dirty rascal" were wrong on so many levels!). Let's start with who was telling us all this unseen treasure.

Our lecturer, Ed Dennison, was from a small company of architectural archaeologists, who have investigated structures ranging from the mediaeval to modern, from milestones to castles and this investigation was a necessary precursor to the planned repair and consolidation work to the castle. Work had started in 1999 and the survey was intended to be holistic. In addition to the investigation of the archival material, including invaluable evidence from previous surveys and pictures, the archaeological and architectural surveys there was also a geographical and an ecological one, looking at the wildlife and plant life that was so much a part of the present castle. All these elements would be used as a base for the consolidation and repair plans.

So what were they looking at? What had this garden feature been? It had been a very comfy high status home, with its four towers and high status rooms over the service block. It was constructed of sandstone, quarried locally, which meant it has worn and damage to the lintels and doorways is especially notable. The gravel also comes from the valley below.

The building was cutting edge when it came to design at the time it was built, with its stunning views across the Wharfe Valley from the high status walkways. It has been suggested it was built over an earlier manor, but so far there has been no evidence of an earlier building.

Envoy for Edward Balliol, King of Scotland, Sir William Aldeberg is generally credited with building the castle from 1364 onward with a licence to crenelate being granted in 1366. He certainly made his mark, with two shields including the Aldeberg Lion decorating the building. In fact such a lavish embellishment very much backs the suggestion that this was Sir William's only residence in the country – this was his showcase.

But the building did not remain an Aldeberg family house, as by 1574 onwards it belonged to the Ryther & Redmond families. In 1630 it was sold and ended its life

as a residence. By 1656 it was ruined, as suggested by the bill of sale, but this was done carefully to recover material. In fact the castle has a succession of different owners, but any plans for it tended to come to nought.

As all such buildings tend to do, this one evolved throughout its life. We can see on both the east and west walls ridge lines, steps and a door showing other buildings had been there earlier. Changes were evident when the ivy was removed to show such signs.

Part of the survey procedure is to look for evidence in documents of how the building looked or was altered. In 1391 the first description we have for the house, in a will, mentions 7 bedrooms. In 1698 there is the first known depiction – a sketch shown on a map. We do not have any plans earlier than 1770, drawn when there was a proposal to convert the building to a malt house – a scheme that was never carried out. In 1789 we know the earlier building had gone as the ridgeline can be seen in an illustration, and in 1798 Turner painted it, with ivy already creeping up the walls of this now romantic ruin. In 1816 a drawing shows the coverage of the ivy increasing and it may be that this was planted to make it a garden feature.

But some of the building's features have survived and clearly a "buffet" inside can be seen. This is a posh display "cabinet" that was built into the wall, backlit with a small window and may well have had curtains in front of it, so the treasures on display within could have been revealed in all their glory.

But the building itself is not the whole story by any means. Earthworks surround it. Originally it was thought those to the North were the remains of an abandoned village, but now it is thought these were gardens. To the south there is a flattened area called the Bowling Green, which was probably a formal garden when the castle was part of pleasure gardens.

Although the A61 now cuts through the complex, this is a relatively modern route, as up to 1751 it originally used to go straight through the valley below, crossing the river by a ford.

In 1966 Anthony Emery produced floor plans and this even included a fascinating circulation diagram, which showed how you could move from room to room. These plans have proved to be very accurate, when compared against the modern survey, made all the more remarkable because Emery could not access all areas.

The latest survey was carried out in the Spring and Summer of 2005 by Ed and his team and this made for a fascinating insight into the detail this procedure involved. Originally here has been a stone by stone survey done, whereby photos are scanned into a computer which then is able to process these to produce accurate drawings. But where vegetation hides the stones from the camera these sections were missing. The building was now surveyed the old fashioned way, by accurate drawing on site. The combination of these two techniques gave a verifiably accurate result.

A lichen survey was done, so no rare lichen will be destroyed in the planned consolidation work on the stonework. A bat survey was done and following this the work sometimes had to be halted or moved in some areas to avoid disturbance. They seemed to move as the scaffolding moved so we were told.

Forty elevation drawings were made, over a thousand photos taken and the analysis of the wealth of data produced highlighted some anomalies in the

construction, although this was to be expected. The junction between the main hall and the service block showed an addition of service stairs which appears to be an afterthought for example, and a big mismatch is to be seen on the entrance tower, where windows are far too close to the wall to be planned like that. There was a suggestion the tower may have been a later addition. The service wing was started first with the other wing added so maybe, although this was a continuous build, the plans were evolving and changing as construction went along.

Not just building mishaps have been shown by the survey, but marvels as well. Perhaps most wonderful was the half a metre wide walkways on top of the walls between the turrets and only accessible from them, with no handrails making stunning (if precarious) views across the valley. The rooms that led to these walkways would also have had amazing views, but who were they for?

Each tower had a sequence of single separate chambers with a garderobe, cupboard recess, window, fireplace and basin at each level. The only access to the upper rooms was by the wall walkways.

The western tower had a number of recesses of full height which look like a basin in some ways. Could this have been an early shower? When we saw the photo is made sense that a person could have stood in the floor level basin and had water poured over him (or her). Or are we too influenced by our modern expectations?

In the 18th and 19th centuries some changes were made. Two large windows were created (enlarged or punched through) which left the tell tail evidence of garderobe chutes coming into them, showing the building was not in use as a residence at this stage (at least we strongly hope not).

Repair work required scaffolding to be erected and this was especially difficult as the slopes are so steep. If, with our modern engineering aids, this was problematic now, imagine the problems the builders must have had. At one stage it was realised that one stone alone was supporting the southwest tower and collapse seemed imminent until repair work was carried out. Wind erosion was also very evident in some areas, especially lintels, where once the roof had gone weaknesses in the stone become apparent. Rubble removed revealed a treat – an intact stairway. Inside some areas modern graffiti was found and this will be left unless it is visible from the ground. Most of the repair work was repointing.

All this work showed more errors in the masonry construction – a stone clearly placed the wrong way around and a window put in the wrong place and filled in.

But more wonders were also found - drainage channels were revealed once the soil from the top of the walls was removed. These were tapered to force the water to move quicker and were stepped through the wall and out through a chute. It was all a great design to shoot the water away from the walls, not dribble down them, which shows a sophisticated and effective design.

The walls themselves are thick but not for defence but to accommodate the garderobes chutes and chimneys. Flues were all interconnected so this had to be pre-planned. At the top all flues come up to circular holes with chimneys on top, which, assuming they were burning low grade coal, must have looked like a 19th century factory if all the fires were going at full pelt. This could explain the blackened stonework.

Elsewhere they found the base of a sconce (a blob of mortar that supported lights) and they got access to the turret tops. Here the elevations showed cruciform arrow slits, showing amazing craftsmanship at a height and just as

complex on the outside which would not have been evident from the ground and confirming the belief that this was a very high status building. Could the turrets have been viewing towers? Far from shabby even now, standing on a flat roof would have given spectacular views before the area was shrouded with trees. You could have seen Skipton, and more to the point they could see you!

As to windows, some had steps up and into them and seats, so they could have been used as places for private conversation away from the bustle of the rest of the room. All could be shuttered, and the construction here again shows sophistication. The windows with views were restricted to high status rooms and, although these were not picture windows, they would have looked over the gardens and the countryside beyond.

The initial survey done, there is still lots to do. The castle can not be said to be put in its full context until the surroundings are investigated, but we have to be careful that the original residents may have seen things very differently and we have to be open to that. There are plenty of unanswered questions. For example, what was the symbolism of carvings that have been found? There is a circular hole in one of the windows – what was that all about? And in the kitchen there is a groove for a board in one window – what was this for? What was retained behind it?

But despite such questions still to be answered the ruined castle, lost for so long, can now be rediscovered. And that's got to be good news.

Of course you can't stop a Yorkshire Branch lecture audience asking questions and giving their memories and this was not exception. And more nuggets of knowledge were thus gained.

It may well be there was a postern gate at one point, but the ground today makes it hard to tell.

Who paid the piper (well the surveyors!)? In this case the bill is split fifty-fifty between English Heritage (there is a page on their website http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conMediaFile.14819 which shows a rather nice picture) and the Harewood Estate. The revenue from the Emmerdale Village was earmarked to provide the estate share.

It is not accessible to the public as yet – it really is not safe and this is the first consideration – but in time it is planned this will change. The ivy that covers the building in some cases may have been preserving it, and was certainly holding it up. We so often assume ivy to be damaging the fabric of a building but sometimes it protects the mortar and stone work. However the surrounding invasive trees and shrubs have been removed and maybe in time it will be more visible again, as had been the case in the past.

Although high status this was not a big household; even at its height Ed doubted the population was more that 50-60. And we even speculated about the water source. There is a 60ft well in the service area, but would this have been enough, or was rain water recycled? With no internal walls left we really can not tell.

And finally, where was the chapel? There was a tiny one, we were told, above the entrance. Only room for 5-6 to stand within this tiny room leading off from the upper hall, the suggestion was most stood in the hall outside during the services.

And there we ended our rediscovery of a local castle. And should you want to hear more of Ed's work (and with a strong Ricardian link) then grab a copy of the

WI book on Sherriff Hutton "Within the Pale", which Ed did not just contribute to but edited.[1]

[1] "Within The Pale – The Story of Sheriff Hutton Park" by Sheriff Hutton Women's Institute Community Pale Project edited by Ed Dennison.