

## 6 Gawthorpe Manor: A Modern Estate in the Making (Part 1 of 2)

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This is a summary of the medieval manor of Gawthorpe and the University of York's current archaeological investigations into its history and context within the wider and better understood house and landscape of Harewood near Leeds, West Yorkshire. A more in-depth discussion of the site and excavation of it will be made following the next field school excavation in May.

### Gawthorpe in Context (the Beginning and the End)

Harewood House, one of the finest 18th century country houses in Yorkshire is well known for its Chippendale furniture, grand terrace and attractive rolling landscape designed by 'Capability' Brown; but few visitors will know the other half of its history, before it was built in 1759.

In 1739, the Lascelles family bought a medieval hall within the joined manorial lands of Gawthorpe and Harewood. These two lands had a close history, not only because they bordered each other, but also because they had both been owned by the Wentworth family in the sixteenth century following an equally long history of shared ownership between two closely tied families since the hall's establishment by the Gascoigne family in the thirteenth century (Rayner, pers. comm., 02/2012). One family lived in the medieval manor house just above a stream called Stank Beck while the other lived in the modest Harewood Castle, situated on a hill not far north of the hall.

However, this long-unchanged habitation of the landscape drastically changed under the ownership from 1739 by the Lascelles who were prospering from an increasingly wealthy income from recent ventures in trade and sugar plantations in Barbados. This was a time of radical change in British society and the steady expansion of a new Empire brought greater stratification of classes. It seems likely that Thomas Lascelles, who was a Yorkshire MP, bought Harewood to be close to his constituency. Like his father, Edwin Lascelles was a politician as well as a super-merchant. We know from documentary evidence that he spent much of his time in London, but perhaps used Harewood as a convenient summer retreat close to his own constituency of Scarborough and then later Northallerton. Soon after the inheritance of Gawthorpe and Harewood from his father in 1753, Edwin Lascelles used Gawthorpe Hall on a permanent basis, mostly serving to entertain guests and allow quick access to his constituencies (Tatlioglu, 2010).

It is not long before the more frequent use of the hall encourages Lascelles to make greater changes to its appearance. Unlike his father, who only made minor alterations to the hall during his infrequent residence there, Edwin sought to sever any association with its increasingly dated, feudal connotations and instead replace it with something more appropriate to demonstrate the success of his capitalistic investments in Barbados and his resulting rise in eighteenth century polite society. To begin with, it was not the hall that was altered but the land around it. Throughout its history, Gawthorpe Hall was surrounded by enclosed fields and buildings to serve the farms and accommodate the people who contributed towards the prosperity of Gawthorpe (Tatlioglu, 2010); though in a new age of international commerce and industry, prosperity of the noble

classes took on entirely different dimensions of space, time and scale. Agriculture was something that could be done hundreds, even thousands of miles away, changing nobility's perception of the use of their immediate environment.

Comparing the landscapes of Harewood in the 1720s (shortly before it was bought by the Lascelles) and today, it is not just the change in house that is obvious, however impressive that transition is, it is also the change in the landscape the replacement of functional enclosed fields with attractive open meadows. It is true that like with many other contemporary transitions of land-ownership, post-medieval countryside was driven by a newly found economic advantage of pastoral lands for rearing sheep for wool (Harewood greatly profited from its significant contribution towards the wool trade in nearby Leeds) (Tatlioglu, 2010); however, this change, in particular to country estates, was also influenced by aesthetic concerns relating to expression of affluence, stability and conformity to the fashionable ideals of polite society where the 'natural' landscape could be incorporated into social and leisure activities. These differences in the perception and portrayal of the landscape of Gawthorpe and Harewood in the 1720s (Finch, pers. comm., 04/2011) and today are evident in the 'tidy' sloping lawn in front of the house designed by 'Capability' Brown; the concealed church and other buildings perhaps reflecting the diminishing importance of religion in the modern world and the increasing efforts of expressed individuality and self-sufficiency amongst the upper classes; and the flooding of the beck to form an attractive lake all of which must have required a great deal of investment of time, money and labour to achieve and maintain without obvious effort.

Although the appearance of Edwin Lascelles' land had been extensively modified throughout the mid-eighteenth century, the hall of Gawthorpe remained. To complete this post-medieval transition, Harewood House was built in 1773. Two years after its completion and the family had moved in, the hall was demolished. It seems from a letter to his Steward, Samuel Popplewell in February 1773, that "I wish Muschamp who be Expeditious in Pulling down the Old House. I see no occasion for the Old Brewhouse nor Laundry to be kept up" (Rayner, pers. comm., 02/2012). Was this the end of Gawthorpe Manor...?

### **Gawthorpe in Context (Middle History)**

The major transitions of Gawthorpe and Harewood summarised above are merely the first and final chapters of the story of the latter's eventual dominance over the former. Documentary evidence reveals further changes in the structure of Gawthorpe Manor during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The earliest known significant alteration to the hall was in 1480 when William Gascoigne received permission to crenellate it (Tatlioglu, 2010). This is significant to the interpretation of transition from medieval manor to post-medieval country estate because it shows that even three hundred years before Gawthorpe Hall was replaced with Harewood House, the owners of the land desired to maintain its affluent and fashionable appearance. To achieve this, not only did a major change to the site occur in the mid-eighteenth century but at multiple times throughout its earlier history it was extensively modified. This has major implications for the interpretation of the archaeology of the hall which will be discussed next time.

A number of alterations to the hall during Sir Thomas Wentworth's residence there are documented. His father, Sir William Wentworth can be considered to

be the first person at Gawthorpe known to allow the abandonment of certain buildings within its land when he married into the family living at Gawthorpe before him and subsequently bought Harewood Castle in 1616, thereby amalgamating the two lands, abandoning the castle and making Gawthorpe, not Harewood, the living quarters of the owners until Edwin Lascelles and his own reversal of this change. Similar to the consequences of the manor becoming the primary seat of the Lascelles family, Thomas Wentworth's more permanent residence at Gawthorpe led to significant changes in its architecture. A new large sandstone wing and walled ornamental gardens are demonstrated in William van der Hagen's illustrations of the hall in the 1720s, just prior to the arrival of the Lascelles. An inventory of the interior of the hall and its contents in 1657 may offer the closest documentation of how the hall was used. A 'Dyning Parlour', 'Great Chamber' and two private rooms were in one part of the hall while a servicing wing contained two parlours, two pantries, a kitchen, a larder, two cellars, a brewhouse, dairy and washhouse (Tatlioglu, 2010). From this it is apparent that by the seventeenth century, Gawthorpe Manor was architecturally a blend of medieval and classical design and was equipped for all the typical requirements of a manorial family. Furthermore, it highlights that any evolution in Gawthorpe was not simple, but progressive over a very long period, accelerating and decelerating whenever a new family arrived with different requirements or personal, social or financial needs. Gawthorpe Manor is also unique archaeologically as it is one of few manor houses to survive well beyond the medieval period, allowing archaeologists to trace its significant changes and infer from those the equivalent changes in society that served as a backdrop to the life history of the building and the people that it contained and served (Finch, pers. comm., 04/2011).

With this gradual evolution of Gawthorpe Manor in mind, the apparently sudden decision made by Edwin Lascelles to demolish the hall in 1773 and his dislike of it may at first be assumed to be due to his aspiration to portray his growing wealth, but such an interpretation is confused by the fact that he had employed the architect John Carr to lavishly modify the hall with a new portico for the main entrance, a garden house for the grounds and a new barn for the surrounding fields in 1754, just five years before work on the new house and gardens began (and one year before the first documented plans for it). Surely, spending good money on major refurbishments and developments to a building and then within a few years knocking it down and spending many more thousands of pounds to create a brand new, even larger one seems a bit short-sighted and financially reckless even for a gentleman who was fast becoming one of Yorkshire's most successful land magnates (a kind of billionaire of his time) (Tatlioglu, 2010). It is possible that Edwin Lascelles went to such extremes to maintain this kind of affluent image to the rest of society, but it is more likely that the final decision to demolish Gawthorpe Hall in the letter above was the final act of a long series of decisions and plans, not necessarily documented or surviving for us to know. As Gawthorpe Manor had been modified over many centuries, it is quite possible that its end was also gradual. The use of documentary evidence from Harewood has proven useful for identifying many of the aspects of how its owners wanted to portray themselves and their land, but its shortfall in allowing us to access many of the personal decisions and private, not discussed or forgotten actions behind the changes that resulted in the evolution of the modern estate have called upon archaeology to attempt

to find many of these aspects which may have been buried with the hall two hundred and fifty years ago.

This is what Dr. Jon Finch of the University of York hopes to better understand by excavating the almost forgotten manor over the coming years from 2011 (Finch, n.d.). Fortunately, there are a few sporadic periods of surviving documentary evidence, one being between 1770 and 1774 during which numerous bills to workmen are recorded for “the pulling down at Old House” (Rayner, pers. comm., 02/2012). These seem to prove that the demolition of the house started before the new house was completed in 1771 and that already, Edwin Lascelles no longer thought of it as his home. If the demolition did occur over four or more years, small parts of the hall and its adjoining buildings must have been removed bit at a time. By excavating what remains beneath the ground it is also hoped that the order that different parts were raised can be understood. An analysis of how he plans to achieve this will be made in the following issue of *The Post Hole* in May during his second season of full-scale excavation there.

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#### **Bibliography**

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