

“A Load of Old Rubbish” Finds from the moat of Kirby Muxloe Castle

The building of Kirby Muxloe Castle was begun by William, Lord Hastings in 1483 and ended shortly after he was beheaded at the Tower of London later that year. Lord Hastings was, during the reign of Edward IV, chancellor of England and consequently a man of great wealth. He was therefore able to indulge his taste for fine buildings in having Kirby Muxloe Castle and the castle at Ashby-de-la-Zouch built. Kirby Muxloe Castle was built as a fortified house, with a gatehouse and drawbridge, base towers, middle towers and a moat, but unfortunately was left unfinished at the time of his death in 1483. The moat was part of the defensive features and was fed by diverting a local stream, with its water levels controlled by sluices.

Parts of the castle were inhabited until the 17th century but gradually fell into disrepair and it was then robbed for building material. By the 19th century, the ruin was covered in ivy, with trees growing out of the walls and cattle grazing in the grounds. However, in 1911 the site, which had been previously owned by the Winstanley family of Braunstone Hall, came under the guardianship of the “Commissioners of Works” and work began to repair and clear the site. Work was also begun to clear the moat, which had become silted up and partly filled with rubbish. It was in this so-called “rubbish” that many articles were found that helped archaeologists to determine how medieval life was lived in Kirby Castle. With none of the modern-day refuse collections, most rubbish was in those times thrown into the moat or put into rubbish pits and burnt. Most of the articles found were indicative of how medieval nobles lived and did not represent the life of the medieval peasants who lived in the surrounding village at that time.

Some of the articles found in the moat:



Cistercian Ware Cup – Cistercian ware was so-called because it was found in the ruins of many Cistercian monasteries and was probably made by the monks. This cup has three handles and is made of earthenware with a glaze to which lead was added to produce the characteristic dark brown metallic-looking effect. Other broken drinking vessels of this type were found in the moat, obviously thrown in there when they became broken. This cup must have been a desirable item of medieval ‘fine dining’ ware. It is likely that it was made at Ticknall in Derbyshire.



Midland Purple Jug – This jug was wheel-thrown with rough inside and outside surfaces and a dark purple to black glaze which did not cover the whole of the pot. A large range of pots were made in the Midlands in this type of earthenware during the 14th and 15th century and included jars, bowls and jugs. It was probably made in Ticknall or Chilvers Coton near Nuneaton. This jug was probably used for wine at the table of Lord Hastings.

Boar’s Head – The medieval diet for the noblemen living in the castle included bread and meat such as pork, mutton and beef. Wild boar would have been hunted by noblemen nearby in Lord (Baron) Hastings’ park – “Baron’s or Barn’s Park”. The diet also included dairy products such as cheese and vegetables – typically cabbage and leeks. Venison would also have been eaten, as antlers were found in the moat from deer hunted in the park.



A peasant’s diet at this time would be mainly bread, pottage (a type of porridge) and stews made with meat if they could afford it, but mainly vegetables.



Copper Alloy Candlestick – this ornate candlestick was made around the 16th century. Candlesticks were an advantage over the pricket type of candle-holder used during the medieval period, where the candle was inserted into a spike. However, rush lights would have been used

to light the rooms and stairways of Kirby Castle. Candles began to be made around the 1300’s and were made from tallow, using fat from cows or sheep. These produced a lot of smoke and gave off an unpleasant smell, so eventually beeswax began to be used to make candles. These were very expensive, so only the rich could afford them.



Iron Pincers – these would have been used for general work done in and around the

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Newsletter No. 3 July 2020

Hi and welcome to our third Kirby Muxloe Local History Group Newsletter !

Since the Covid-19 virus pandemic continues, we’ve produced another newsletter to keep in touch with you. We hope to return to “normal” (whatever that turns out to be) as soon as we can, but for now, we hope you enjoy reading this.

So please accept it with the compliments of our Committee:

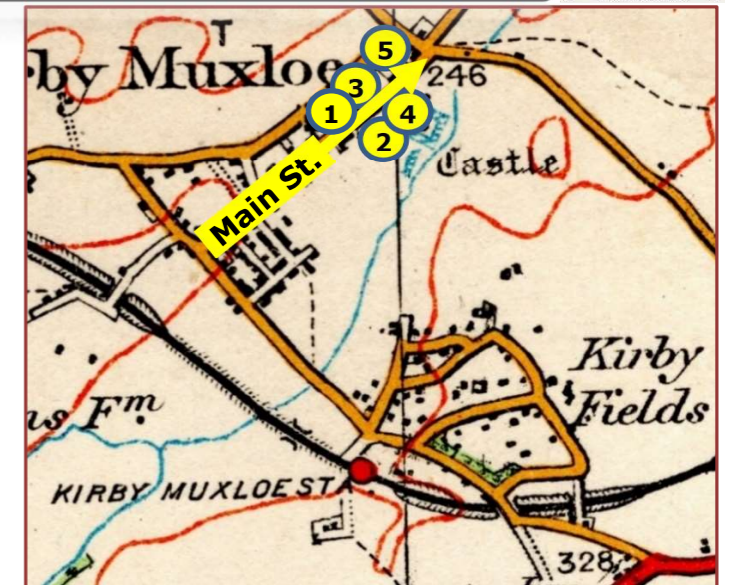
- Mike Gould (Chair)
- Val Knott (Secretary)
- Kate Traill (Treasurer)
- Judith Upton (Archivist)
- Kerry Burdett

We start by again turning back the clock and continuing on our virtual walk around the Kirby of 1945 and the following years – see map for numbers.

① Backtracking a little along the north side of Main Street we come to one of the oldest houses in the village. The Old White House cannot easily be seen from the roadside and is surrounded by shrubs and trees. In 1945, as we pass by the wheelwright’s building next door, we would hear the familiar sound of Tom Moore at work.

The Old White House dates back to the fifteenth century or possibly earlier. This was originally a stone-built single storey building and it is believed that some of the original stonework can still be seen at the rear of the house. It is thought that the house functioned as an ale house until at least the eighteenth century. In years gone by, when transport was sparse and people only travelled to nearby places on a day’s outing, visitors came to the village on day trips. They usually visited the castle and then took tea and refreshments, often in the gardens of the Old White House. It is known that in previous years, there was a right of way right through the ground floor of the house. Dr Garfit, who came to the village around 1897 as the local doctor, made a point of walking straight through the house (the front and back door were aligned) once a year, thus preserving the right of way. For some time, this was continued by a Mr Pemberton. It is believed that this right of way has now lapsed.

In the years around 1911, the house was occupied by a Miss Westland, who was listed as a “farmer”. Miss Westland had five boarders and two relatives living with her at this time. It is not clear who occupied the house after this date. Do any of our readers remember who was there during and just after WWII? By around 1950, our well-known village doctor, Dr Jones, will be living at the Old White House. A wooden hut that can be seen from the road will be erected and this will house the doctor’s surgery, serving Kirby Muxloe and Ratby. The surgeries will continue to be held here until 1969, when Forest House surgery will open at Braunstone crossroads.



② Madder’s bakery had long served the village with fresh bread, baked in the ovens at number 43, Main Street. By 1941, the bakery had disappeared and been replaced by a garage with one petrol pump, belonging to John Forman.

③ Back to the north side of Main street and at number 34, we come across Jones and Overton, electricians. There is also a shop that sells hardware, which is run by Mrs Overton. As the years go by, the name of the shop will change to Craft Services, still selling hardware and still under the same ownership. Eventually it will become the Post Office, as it is today.

④ As we reach Castle Farm, we might have memories of frogs! During the war, Joyce recalls walking along Main Street as a youngster and suddenly feeling something soft and squashy beneath her feet. On looking down, she found to her amazement that the road was covered with frogs! She just couldn’t walk, there were masses of them, presumably coming from the moat and travelling to pastures new. Or perhaps there is the smell of cheese. Back in 1932, Richard Wathes, was listed as a hay farmer and cheese factor. Children who used to play in the loft of the barn remember the pungent smell of ripening Leicester cheeses.

⑤ At the junction of Main Street and Ratby Lane, we arrive at Faith Cottage. Its origins make it well-named. When Henry Henser moved there around 1876, he was soon offering his house as the first meeting place for the non-conformists of the village. The family erected a wooden shed in their front garden with three signs on the side. One was “Prepare to meet thy God”. Later, a mother and daughter moved in, who were believed to have been Plymouth Brethren and who were referred to as “Pilgrims” by the villagers. One day, a young man of the village was speeding down Blood’s Hill on his motor bike when he lost control and crashed through the Faith Cottage hedge, landing beside the shed. On looking up, dazed, all he could see was a sign reading “Prepare to meet thy God” !

Landlords of The Royal Oak

1810 - Jonah Poyner seems to be the first tenant of the Royal Oak, then a cottage property, when it was first licensed in 1810, and although he was the licensee he was also a black & whitesmith. (A blacksmith forges iron and a whitesmith forges tin or pewter - also known as a tinsmith). His name appears in the 1826 poll book showing him to be a whitesmith of West Bridge, Leicester. Later references to him show his address as Applegate.

Jonah was born at Kirkby Mallory in 1773 the son of Charles and Mary (Dowler). He married Mary Brewin of Leicester Forest at Braunstone in 1800. Mary's family were licensed victuallers at the Red Cow at Leicester Forest. The couple had at least 5 children baptised at Kirby.

Jonah died in 1839 age 66 and is buried at St Mary de Castro church. Mary was still alive in 1851 and was living with her daughter Ellen (or Helen) and grandson George in Bakehouse Lane Leicester.

Jonah Poyner, formerly for many years blacksmith at Kirby Muxloe and Braunstone, but latterly residing in Applegate-street, in this town. Mr P. was well-known and generally respected.

Leicester Mercury Obituary dated February 1839

1820 - John Bruce was the next licensee. John of Kirby Muxloe married Mary Pratt of Dunton Bassett in December 1814. The couple had 5 children baptised at St Bartholomew's Church, and a further 3 at Evington between 1824 and 1830. No birth or death has been found for John, but 3 of his children were in Thrusington at the time of the 1841 census. His son William, a butcher, born in 1815 married Mary Ann Johnson of Houghton on the Hill, and lived there for a while before moving to Humberstone.

1823 - William Bruce is now the licensee. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of John Chapman and Alice Gunn in 1814 at Kirby, although they were both residents of Leicester Forest. Elizabeth died in 1884 age 41 and was buried at Kirby. No further information about the couple has yet been found.

1826 - James Kinton, who was also a blacksmith, took over as licensee. James was born at Desford in 1800, the son of James and Mary (Cufflin). He married Caroline Wilkinson in June 1823 and their only child Mary Elizabeth was born later the same year. He is listed on the 1841 census as blacksmith, age 40, with his wife Caroline age 40, and daughter Mary age 15.

Caroline was the daughter of John Wilkinson of Kirby and Mary Almay of Aylestone, who had at least ten children baptised at Kirby Church.

The 1846 City & County Directories show Caroline Kinton as a victualler at the Royal Oak.

James died in September 1844 age 43, leaving Caroline to run the business until her death in July 1847. Mary Elizabeth died at the age of 22 in 1846. All three are buried in Kirby churchyard.

1847 - Jane Wilkinson takes over from her sister

Caroline. In 1851, sisters Jane and Martha Wilkinson were listed on the census as licensed victuallers at the Royal Oak. The sisters had moved out of the village by 1861 where Jane can be found as housekeeper for her brother Samuel in Aston Birmingham. Martha was with her brother Robert and family in Worcestershire in 1871.

In 1851 their brother John (born 1804) was a victualler at the Nag's Head, Glenfield. By 1861 he is living at Ratby with his wife Ann (Branson) and is a victualler at Ratby Wharf. He died in 1867 leaving his widow Ann to run the business. She was still there in 1881, but by 1891 she was living at Stamford Street, where she gives her occupation as retired publican. In 1901 she is living with her brother Thomas and family at Old Hayes Farm, Ratby.

1855 - The Royal Oak, a freehold property was sold by auction with the following description:

Public House comprising bar parlour, tap room, kitchen, cellar, brew house, 4 bedrooms, stables piggeries with garden and croft, in the occupation of Miss Jane Wilkinson. Also 3 messuages, and blacksmith's shop adjoining the public house with

yards, gardens and appurtenances in the occupation of Elizabeth May, Josh Taylor, William Cockerill and - Chesterton

1861 - James Colpass was the next licensed victualler. James was born in 1826 at Bishop's Waltham Hampshire. In 1851

he was lodging in Ratby with farmer William Beaumont and family and his occupation was a railway collectors' agent. James married William's daughter Anne in 1854 and by 1861 the couple were at the Royal Oak. Their son Harry Beaumont Colpass was born in 1865. Ann died in 1875 age 51, and James continued as licensee at least until 1883 where he is named in The City and County Directories. He possibly continued as publican until his death in 1888. James and Ann are buried in Kirby churchyard. Harry married Jane Wells Hitchcock in 1890 at All Saints church Leicester. She was the daughter of Robert and Fanny Hitchcock of the Red Cow Leicester Forest.



1891 - John Spiers is now the inn keeper. He was born in Coventry and living at Earl Shilton in October 1846 at time of his marriage to Sarah (Haywood). His occupation at this time was an agricultural labourer. The family moved to Leicester Forest East where they are listed on the 1861 and 1871 census. In 1881 John and Sarah were living next to the Royal Oak where John is listed as a coachman, domestic servant and Sarah is a laundress.

The 1891 census tells us that John is 73 and an inn keeper, Sarah is 67. Living with them is their son Thomas age 37 (a coal merchants manager), his wife Hannah and four children.

The entry in Wright's Directory of 1892 names John Spiers - Royal Oak, but in 1898 he is listed as joint tenant with Albert Davey.

In 1901 Sarah is living at Woodbine Cottages in the village. She is a widow age 76 and gives her occupation as retired publican. John had died 1894 age 76.



To be continued

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Future KMLHG Meetings and Membership

At the time of writing, it is not clear when we will next be able to hold a meeting, or whether we will need to implement some form of social distancing when we do. Clearly, the Church Hall does not lend itself to this. We will continue to review the situation and post any announcements on our website, in Your Local magazine and in the Library. If you are currently a member, your membership will be extended automatically until May 2021 at no cost to you.

Are you enjoying our Newsletters? Are there any history-related subjects that you would like us to cover? We welcome feedback, either directly to a Committee member or by email - see right:

"A Load of Old Rubbish"

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castle and were useful for holding objects firmly and bending them into shape. They would have been used for making iron pintles, door hinges and horseshoes, many of which have been found in the moat.



Medieval Floor Tile - this is one of several tiles which would have covered the floors of the important rooms in the castle. Floor tiles were made from the 13th century onwards and were used in monastic and other important medieval buildings. They were made from clay and have decorative letters and designs stamped onto the tile. The impressions are filled with white clay before being glazed to give a two-colour effect. The tiles found in the moat are similar to those found in Ulverscroft Abbey. During the search for Richard III, archaeologists found similar floor tiles when they unearthed the remains of Greyfriars in Leicester.

These are just a few of the many artefacts thrown away as rubbish nearly 600 years ago which have given us an insight into how life was lived at Kirby Castle.

I would like to thank Leicestershire County Council Museums for the photographs used in this article.

VK

Kirby Muxloe Castle

Although English Heritage, the owners of Kirby Muxloe Castle, are in the process of opening many of their sites, they have said on their website that unfortunately, they won't be able to open Kirby Muxloe Castle this season.

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