

Speaker Notes for Phil Burton - Ormesby Hall - Home of the Pennyman Family

The Chairman was very pleased to introduce Phil Burton to present his talk, "Ormesby Hall – Home of the Pennyman Family, 1599 - 1983".

Phil had a long career in electrical engineering services with the General Post Office specialising in improving the effectiveness of the telephone service. Following retirement he became a National Trust volunteer at Ormesby Hall.

The Pennyman family were first recorded in the area at Stokesley in the 1400's and one member was a vicar in the town. They bought a minor estate with a farm in the Ormesby area in Elizabethan times. They were involved in the Rising of the North, and following Queen Elizabeth I regaining control, a Pennyman family member was arrested along with many others for their involvement, all of whom were subsequently tried, found guilty of treason, and executed in York. Interestingly, later generations of the family were ardent Royalists.

The original house was single storey, which over the years was increased to two storeys, extended, and finally transformed into an imposing hall. During the 1740's this was rebuilt into the grand house seen today.

The family inter married with other influential land-owning families, most notably the Wharton's of Beverley, and the Worsley's. With these marriages the Pennyman's status, lands and wealth grew appreciably. They owned extensive estates and houses in the area including Normanby Hall, Thornton Hall and Marske Old Hall, and were some of the most wealthy and influential families in this part of the country.

As with many wealthy families, sooner or later there comes along a black sheep who inherits the estates, and squanders much of the assets judicially accumulated by previous generations.

And the Pennyman's profligate son was Sir James, 6th Baronet (1736 – 1796).

Born in Beverley, James moved to Ormesby when he inherited the title, Hall and estates. He was an incorrigible gambler and spender, and eventually he bankrupted the estate, and had to sell off much land to pay off the debts. However, despite the eventual negative effect on the estate due to his lifestyle, he left a positive legacy by building the impressive stable block, with its grand clock tower and clock. The clock is quite unique being pendulum and chain driven and having unusual movement features. Remarkably, it is still keeping accurate time – a testament to its design and build quality.

Although with reduced wealth the family continued to have influence and impact on the area and built several local hospitals and numerous churches over the following years.

James (Jim) Pennyman was the last to carry the family name. He served and was injured in WW1 having metal fragments embedded in his torso. These were subsequently removed during a difficult and risky operation requiring the removal of two ribs. During recovery he was presented with the ribs, which he displayed in the house much to the amusement of guests.

Interestingly, Jim was a staunch Tory and right leaning whereas his wife, Ruth, was very left leaning verging on being a communist. Ruth, against Jim's requests, went to participate in the Spanish Civil War. She returned with thirty Spanish refugees and settled them in the area. There are several descendants to be found now living in the Guisborough area.

Despite being at such odds ideologically, they enjoyed a fulfilling and happy period as custodians of the hall and estates. They were keen patrons of the arts and regularly held theatrical performances and workshops.

When Jim died in 1961 the Pennyman bloodline ended. He bequeathed the hall and grounds to the National Trust with the proviso that Ruth could live at the house for the remainder of her days.

When she died in 1983 the National Trust then had full access to the house and much work began in preparing it for opening to the public.

Following several questions and thanks from the Chairman for a fascinating and very unique presentation, Members expressed their thanks and appreciation to Michael in the customary manner with a hearty round of applause.

JE 18.3.25