

MANOR (HOUSE) FARM, FRONT STREET

Newer residents of Middleton may have wondered from time to time what was originally behind the time worn and variegated brickwork of the walls around the present Robin Hood car park. This was Manor Farm also referred to as Manor House Farm probably because of the association with the old Manor Court.

In Sheahan and Whellan's "History and Topography of York and the East Riding published in 1856 the authors state: "The Manor House is a small ancient building in the village and there is an ancient farm house, near the church, now the residence of Mr Robert Railton, the walls of which are three feet in thickness; and from foundations discovered around both of these houses they are supposed to occupy the sites of large mansions".

For a later description one can go to the details of an auction held on the 8 March 1921 in the Bell Hotel, Driffield when on the instructions of Hugo William Cecil, Earl of Londesborough Manor Farm, 155 acres was sold at a price of £4500. The sale details describe the farm house as "substantially built of brick and tiled and contains 7 bedrooms with 2 separate staircases, dining room, drawing room, kitchen with large oven, back kitchen, dairy, 2 cellars and pantry".

For centuries the farm was associated with the Witty family (the spelling differs at different periods) who were said to have been descended from a common ancestor Roger Whytter a wool merchant who fled from Flanders to Beverley in 1275. There have been several distinguished members of the family including a Doctor Robert Witty who helped to popularize Scarborough as a spa in the 17th Century. References to the family in Middleton go back to 1534 when Peter Wittye left goods to his wife and son and in 1588 the widow of Phillipe Wytte left items of clothing to her relatives.

At the time of the Civil War the Witty family supported the Royalist cause and Philipp Wittie was fined £14 in 1645 for assisting the enemy when Queen Henrietta Maria (wife of Charles 1st) landed at Bridlington. Later references include Philip Witty as Parish Constable in 1672 and in 1795 William Witty was an assessor for the land tax. In the 1840s and 50s Christopher Witty was a brewer and publican in South Street.

In 1935 the Driffield Times carried a report on the final departure of the family from the farm when Mr & Mrs Charles Harold Witty left to take up residence at Park Farm, Barthorpe, severing a connection of nearly three hundred years. Frank Hepworth took over.

The Manor House is referred to as the venue for meetings of the body which dealt with minor agricultural matters and the following extract from the Jury Verdicts (1704 – 1899) in the Brynmor Jones library gives the description and composition of the court.

"Manor of Middleton – The Great Court Leet Court Baron view of Frank Pledge and Copy hold or Customary Court of the Right Honourable William Henry Forester Denison, Earl of Londesborough, Lord of the said manor held in and for the same manor, at the usual place, The Manor House on Friday the 13th October 1893 before the Suitors of the Court and Herbert Usher, Steward of the said Court and Manor.

The Jury
Robert Witty (foreman)
William Hornby
William R Scruton
William Wilson
Arthur Clark
Jabez Witty

Henry Ruston
John Dere
Henry Simpson
Thomas Simpson
John Newlove
George H Brown.

At this court John Butler was appointed Provider for the ensuing year.

During the war part of the building was used as an ARP room which in turn was used for meetings of the Parish Council.

The eventual demolition of the building after the war, without thought being given to restoration, robbed the village of an interesting piece of history.