

Neville's Castle



Archaeological interest centres on the site of Neville Castle, located at the south-eastern edge of Manor Vale (grid.ref. SE 6946 8694). The castle and associated remains were excavated over several seasons between 1962 and 1974 and the findings published (see Dornier, 1967 and Williams, 1977). The later excavations were funded by the Department of the Environment in advance of building development on part of the castle site.

12th Century pottery shards suggest a long history of human occupation of the castle site with a timber-framed hall established there from around 1300. The original buildings were occupied until the late 15th or early 16th Century then demolished to make way for a more substantial hunting lodge.

This lodge, Neville Castle, replaced Stuteville Castle (a moated enclosure on Vivier's Hill, 500 m. to the east) as the seat of Manor of Kirkbymoorside, held by the Neville family. This was a high status dwelling of domestic rather than defensive or military purpose, and comprised a set of stone buildings surrounding a courtyard.

By around 1600 the castle had fallen into disuse, the seat of the Manor having been transferred to High Hall, some 200 m. to the south. Rimington (1977) states that the castle was dismantled in 1616 to provide building material for High Hall.

Neville Castle was attached to a pre-existing deer park enclosing an area between Park lane and the Gillamoor Road with a perimeter of 3.75km. Low and High Park Farms are reminders of this, the former probably being the original park warden's residence (Rimington, 1977). The presence of a deer park is of considerable ecological as well as historical interest, since these enclosures often protected areas of natural woodland and provided a link between the prehistoric 'wild wood' and the modern landscape. Manor Vale lay within the park pale (perimeter) and ancient woodland here may be a vestige of the mediaeval landscape.

Oak timber from Kirkbymoorside park was sent to repair Meaux Abbey near Beverley in the early 12th Century. Rimington (1970) mentions that Baldwin de Wake owned the Kirkbymoorside park in the 13th Century and in 1282 it was said to be "of a legue in circuit and to contain seven score beasts". In 1570, the park was described as adjoining the site of the Neville Castle, being

“...very well planted with wood and timber, wherein large laundes and is well replenished with fallow deer and containeth in compass two miles and a half in measure and CLXXVII acres, wherein one Keeper, William Bankes, which hath stipend yearly of LX s., VIII d...” (cited in Rimington, 1977)

The park was shown as an enclosure on Saxton’s Map of Yorkshire of 1577 and John Speede’s map of the North and East Ridings of 1610. By the 17th Century however, most of the park had been turned over to agriculture, presumably coinciding with the dereliction of Neville Castle.

More recent land use does not appear to be well-documented. Quarrying has clearly taken place within Manor Vale and the amount of woodland has probably varied over time.

Part of the site was used by the army during World War II, with nissen huts present in the early 1940s.

For a period up until the 1960s, part of Manor Vale continued to be grazed by live-stock. Evidence of this can be seen around Low Knoll where there has been dense, even-aged regeneration of thorn scrub after grazing ceased.