

## Architecture Group's visit to Newark Castle in May

On Thursday, 21 May the Architecture group met at Newark Castle to take part in a guided tour given by 'Floss', the Castle Warden. The Castle was built originally of wood and was surrounded by the River Trent and a deep moat. The site was of strategic importance as two main roads crossed at that point – now the A45 and the A1. The river Trent bridge was the last crossing point on the way North and was built of wood until the 1800's so that it could be burnt if the enemy advanced (hence 'burn your bridges'). In 1123 the third Bishop of Lincoln, the self-styled Alexander the Magnificent, convinced King Henry that he was building a Palace on the site, and not a Castle, as Henry would have regarded a castle as a threat, by putting an anti-clockwork spiral staircase in the main Gateway (which could not be defended or attacked by right-handed men) and an ornate fishpond in the grounds. The main Norman gateway was the first to be built in Northern Europe and was the first building to be listed in the National Monuments Register in the 1840's, followed by the White Tower of London. The rounded doors and windows were Early Norman and had glass shutters in the windows. A second curtain wall was built around the Castle in 1265 and a stronger mortar was used which allowed it to be three times higher and Gothic, or pointed, arch windows to be built in it. The Castle was built of limestone and sandstone and some of it came from near Cresswell Crags and the remainder from Lincolnshire. The stone has to be treated by specialists every five years to prevent deterioration because of current pollution.



On 19 October 1216 King John died in the Bishop's private chapel above the drawbridge. (Floss felt he had been somewhat maligned as he had to gather taxes to fund his father's, and then his brother Richard the Lionheart's exploits.

After three years of bombardment the siege of Newark by Parliamentarians ended in 1646 and Cromwell ordered the 'slighting' of the Castle ie it's destruction. One thousand troops were engaged in blowing up the Castle, starting from the town side, so that the remaining inhabitants could see it being carried out, however, the plague came north to Newark and the troops fled before it. The last barrel of gunpowder exploded by them was in the guardroom by the

drawbridge as they hurriedly left and the hole it made, and the blackened stones, can still be seen. The people of Newark were ordered to complete the destruction but did not do so and twenty-five percent of the Castle remains above ground and fifty percent below.

The doors to the Castle are kept locked to deter vandalism and Floss unlocked the tower and most of the group climbed the seventy-seven steps to look at the view. Floss then led the group down into the undercroft where supplies were stored – enough for three thousand in the Castle and the town for three months. Beer was brewed in the undercroft in three large barrels, twenty-four hours a day; supper or super beer 13%, a second or social brew for the daytime 5 to 8% and a third or small beer 3-5% for the children.

Bishops kept armoury in the undercroft and twelve knights or soldiers were maintained to serve the Bishop.

When facing the remaining wall and towers, the Bishop's Palace was on the right and the South West tower on the left was the Magistrates Court and the prisons. Debtors were kept in reasonable rooms for seven days, sixty at a time for seven days in the small holding cell and then thrown into the debtors dungeon to die if debts (usually taxes) were not paid.

What initially looked to be just a wall with towers at each end came to life when Floss explained about its construction and how it had been used over the years. If anyone else would like to take a guided tour of the Castle please contact the Tourist Information office at Newark and ask for 'Floss', the Castle Warden, as she is informative and entertaining and the Castle becomes much more than a pile of stones.

Jill Phillips

Photos by Ann Baker

