

WINSTANLEY HALL

“WINSTANLEY is a fertile and picturesque township, rich in the prevailing mineral of the district...” (Baines, *History of Lancashire* 2nd rev. ed. 1891)

Local press has recently reported that the current owners of Winstanley Hall, Dorbcrest Homes, were being urged to complete urgent work on the Hall and Courtyard.

Dorbcrest had originally bought the property around four years ago with the view to restoring the Hall and converting part of it to luxury flats. Unfortunately, they decided this was no longer feasible, since the schemes put forward were deemed incompatible with green belt policies.

This has led to Wigan Council Planning Department issuing an Urgent Works Notice to safeguard the future of the Grade II listed hall and courtyard buildings. These major structural problems include bulging walls, dry rot, collapsed floors and dangerous chimneys. But a look at these pictures show the Hall's former splendour and proud heritage.

The Beginnings

Most early 16th century manor houses were built of timber on



Early engraving of the Hall

stone foundations. Towards the end of that century, fashion changed and more substantial houses out of stone began to be built. The oldest portion of the present Winstanley Hall dates from the period 1555-1561. An even earlier house probably existed from as early as 1402, adjacent to the still visible moat.

The earliest documentary evidence regarding the Winstanley family, however, is dated 1240. These early houses were built by the Winstanleys. They intermarried with other local landowners, notably the Langtons, who held the Barony of Newton, and the Crosse family of Wigan, Chorley and Liverpool.

This particular period of time in Lancashire was turbulent, with invading Scottish armies and pillaging by barons, especially

during the Banastre rebellion. The two factions of Sir Adam Banastre and Sir Robert Holland generally caused havoc by their incursions throughout South West Lancashire, especially in the areas around Wigan and Pemberton. The rebellion was crushed in 1315 with one of the participants, Sir William Bradshaigh, being forced to flee the country. Others

paid with their lives.

The Bankes come to Winstanley

Following the death of Edmund Winstanley in 1592, the manor passed to Edmund's nephew, also an Edmund, who was living in Wales. Since he was evidently settled there, a buyer was sought. In January 1595 James Bankes, goldsmith and resident of London, took possession of the manor of Winstanley.

Upon the death of James in 1617 the manor passed to his son William, who in turn came to leave the estate to his son. The succession continued smoothly through the generations until the death of another William Bankes in 1800. This William had been born in 1751 and was an indefatigable

Continued on page 10



An early aerial photograph of Winstanley Hall and estate buildings



Squire Bankes in front of the Hall

WINSTANLEY HALL

Continued from page 9

traveller both in Britain and abroad. His health, however, was never robust and Lancashire's damp climate did not help. By the age of 47, he was confined to the house due to his failing health. Upon his death the direct male line died out and the property was left to his first cousin, Rev Thomas Holme of Upholland, the son of Ann Banks. Rev Holme died in 1803 and was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Meyrick Holme, who took the name and arms of Banks in 1804. He became High Sheriff of Lancashire in 1805.



Meyrick Banks

Upon his death in 1827, his only son Meyrick succeeded him. At this time the Winstanley estate extended to Winstanley, Billinge, Pemberton, Upholland, Newton Park and Lower Cudworth (near Barnsley), as well as the houses of Winstanley Hall and Holland Hall and, of course, the coal pits. By the time of Meyrick II's death in 1881, the family had also acquired a large estate at Letterewe in Scotland and Bispham Hall near Billinge. Squire Banks was heavily involved with the running of his coal mines and was often to be seen at one or other of his pits at 5.30 a.m. Meyrick actually died at his offices in Old Hall Street, Liverpool. His funeral was still remembered in



Amy Banks

Wigan in 1945, and there was said to be "not a yard of black cloth" to be had in Wigan. The assembled crowds watching the funeral procession were said to have numbered in the region of 10,000.

The estate then passed to the Squire's daughter, Eleanor, wife of William John Murray. She too assumed the name and arms of Banks. Following her death in 1907, her son, George Hildyard Banks, inherited the estate. He was married to Amy Orkney Stracathro, daughter of Charles Robertson of Kindeace, Ross-shire.

The 20th Century

Both George and Amy Banks became local magistrates. Amy was

very active locally, being variously President of Ince Women's Unionist Association, the Billinge branch of the National Life Boat Association and the Wigan and District Nursing Association and Vice-President of St Margaret's Home for Girls, Goose Green, as well as being a member of Billinge Parochial Church Council and a Trustee of Edelstone Charity, Billinge. For many years she was also County Commissioner for N.W. Lancashire for Girl Guides Association and organised many local events for charities.

George Hildyard Banks became Sheriff of Lancashire in 1921. Upon his death, their daughter Joyce Helena Murray Banks inherited the property. Joyce married Captain Edward William Jervis Banks R.N. at Billinge St Aidan's Church on 23 April 1929. Their grandson, Timothy Guy, was still living in the Lodge at Winstanley Hall until recently. Other members of the family had moved south to Gloucestershire and one branch now has a bookshop in Bath.

Joyce Banks was very interested in the history of the estate and had completed two volumes of a history and part of a third volume before her death in 1974. The last volume was completed by her daughter, Elizabeth Garland. There is a copy of this three volume work in the History Shop for reference purposes.



Wedding of Joyce Banks and Capt. Edward Banks, 1929

Winstanley Hall during the Wars

During the two World Wars, the Hall and its grounds were given over to a different clientele. In 1914, G H Bankes offered the Hall as accommodation to the Red Cross Society for wounded soldiers and sailors. He offered not only to fit out the Hall as a hospital, but also to do the same at his other seat, Balconie Castle, Ross-shire. However it would also seem that the Hall was used as a military training and transit camp. Units of Royal Engineers who were sent to Gallipoli and also the 6th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment are known to have stayed there.



The Stable block



Winstanley Hall Lodge, Pemberton Road

In World War II, the grounds were home to W.A.A.F.'s in nissen huts. After they moved out, squatters moved in - 20 families of local homeless people, many of whom were ex-servicemen. By September Billinge Council's Medical Officer had inspected the dwellings and pronounced the squatters "comfortably settled and wanting for nothing from the public health standpoint. There was no

overcrowding". Arrangements were made to collect rent of 10 shillings. They stayed for about a year.

Sources

Joyce H.M. Bankes *Winstanley Hall* (unpublished typescript)
 W.B. Savigny *History of Bispham Hall, Billinge* (typescript)
 R. Winstanley *Winstanley and Highfield* (1998) Typescript
 Wigan Council website
www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/council/agendas.
Wigan Observer

THE Hall, in the main, is a stone built Elizabethan manor house with extensive alterations at the end of the 18th century. The basic plan of the Tudor House can still be traced i.e. central hall with parlour coming off one side and a chamber over the hall. The hall faces east and west according to Tudor custom.

Over the succeeding centuries, the Tudor house was extended to provide more comfortable accommodation, with Meyrick (Holme) Bankes making considerable alterations in the years 1812-27. Part of the west front was raised by one storey and a parapet added. A three-storey block with porch was added to the North West front and became the main entrance. The Holme and Bankes coat of arms and the date 1819 was added (see right, top). It is thought that Lewis Wyatt worked at Winstanley 1818-19. Plans are in existence that were signed by him. Meyrick's son Meyrick (1811-81) further extended the Hall and its site. The courtyard and an outside staircase were added alongside an older barn. William Spence (1793-1849), a noted sculptor from Liverpool, was commissioned to create a large fountain of Neptune in the courtyard (see right, bottom), apparently to Meyrick Bankes' own design. William Spence is thought to have sculpted a marble bust of William Roscoe, the Liverpool abolitionist, which now resides in the National Portrait Gallery in London. Meyrick Bankes also designed the new decorative glass windows. Further alterations were made between 1881-1904 when two bays were built on the west side of the house.

