

THE HALL

Many people in Middleton know that beyond the long brick wall at the side of the road to Beverley there used to be a substantial house known as The Hall. Perhaps less well known however is that it was originally built as a Rectory. The year was 1809 and the rector had been awarded a substantial amount of land in lieu of lost tithes following the Act of Enclosure which took place in the village from 1803-5. On the national scene the years 1809 and 1810 were the last of George III's reign before his profligate son, the future George IV, took over as Regent following his father's descent into madness. The Napoleonic wars were still raging and Jane Austen was writing her novels.

The building itself, though not as grand as other East Riding houses was destined to have a significance way beyond the sum total of its bricks and mortar, with the owners, whether the Rectors or later the Squire, exercising a form of social control, usually benevolent but requiring deference on the part of villagers. The expression "The Hall" came to symbolise that control in all its manifestations.

ORIGINS

The terrier compiled in 1817 by the then rector, John Blanchard, Senior (1760-1827) states that in 1809 permission was obtained from the Archbishop of the Diocese to take down the old parsonage house and outhouses and build a new one. The site chosen was about 400 yards farther from the Church on glebe land abutting to the north east on the Beverley Road, bounded on the south by the Lordship of Lund and on the east by John Railton's land.

The architect was Peter Atkinson (Junior) of York.

The description of the layout of the new property includes the following:

"On the east side of the house is the courtyard the length of which is 115 feet 9 inches and the breadth 101 feet 4 inches:- at the east end of this are the outhouses adjoining each other and extending the whole breadth of the courtyard is a garden surround except on the west side thereof by a fence wall."

The ground floor of the house comprised a dairy, pantry, scullery, kitchen, storeroom, vestibule, stairs, breakfast room, dining room, hall and drawing room.

In Sheehan & Whellans's history and topography of York and the East Riding (1856) the Rectory is described as "a large brick mansion erected about the year 1810 by the father of the present Rector". The present Rector referred to was John Blanchard (1790-1862) who was also vicar of Lund with Kilnwick and a Justice of the Peace for the East Riding for 34 years and Deputy Lieutenant for 35 years. In his obituary notice in the Beverley Guardian of the 22nd November 1862 it states:

"To the poor he was humane and charitable and from the amenity of manners, a perpetual cheerfulness of temper added to an inconsiderable amount of wit and humour he was a general favourite". It went on to say that "a long and tedious illness which he bore with exemplary patience and resignation, while it tamed down the exuberance of his animal spirits brought out

the better part of his nature and he passed his time in a diligent preparation for eternity". The "animal spirits" referred to probably mean his sporting interest for as David Neave has pointed out he was a typical Victorian "Squarson" i.e. the combination of squire and parson with a fondness for field sports. He was however instrumental in securing the restoration of Lund church and (surprisingly) an early supporter of the Foresters.

On the question of games it is worth recording that a cricket match took place in the Rectory grounds in 1856 between Middleton and Etton. The Middleton team consisted of Cass, Foss, Revd. J J Hutchings, W Crosby, Ford, Park, Rev J Blanchard, Lotherington, Norman, Vary and Brewe. But who won?

The 1841 census reveals that the Rector had a butler, a cook and a housemaid. In 1851 the household had changed with a house servant, a house maid, kitchen maid, footman and coachman.

There is a story that the rector sold the house because an unpleasant incident had taken place the association of which made it uncomfortable to stay. In 1867 a new rectory was built nearer the church. The existing one had passed into the ownership of the Brooksbank family and the property which previously had been known as the Hall was to be called Middleton Hall.

Captain (later Colonel) Arthur Brooksbank (1831-1903) was born at Tickhill near Doncaster the third son of the Revd Edward Hawke Brooksbank of Healaugh Manor, Tadcaster and Hannah, daughter of Benjamin Heywood of Staveley Hall near Wakefield. Educated at Rugby he entered the army in 1851 and served with the 38th Regiment in the Crimean War 1854-5. He was present at the Battle of Inkerman and the siege and fall of Sevastopol for which he was decorated. In addition he received the order of the MEDJIDIE, a Turkish medal. He left the regular army and joined the "Yorkshire Artillery" militia at Scarborough in 1861. He was a Justice of the Peace for 20 years and a keen sportsman. He took a great interest in local matters and was instrumental in establishing the village reading and recreation room. The park adjoining the hall was at the disposal of cricket and football teams which he often entertained. He had his own cricket team. He was married to the daughter of the Revd H O Lonsdale, vicar of St Mary's Lichfield by whom he had five sons and two daughters. His wife, Anna Maria, died in February 1899 aged 72. The Driffield Times stated that her "unobtrusive kindness and charity had endeared her". He died on 21st December 1903 and is buried in a family grave in the churchyard.

In 1891 his household domestic staff consisted of a ladies' maid, cook housemaid, serving maid, under housemaid, kitchen maid, footman and groom.

He was succeeded by his son Captain Arthur Heywood Brooksbank, born on the 19th December 1856 who after retiring from the 19th Hussars settled down to the life of a country gentleman. In 1890 he married Dora Helen a daughter of Sir Richard Baggallay who was one of the Lord Justices of Appeal. Captain Brooksbank was, like his father, a magistrate and a Commissioner of the Driffield Navigation. He died on the 24th May 1917 and is buried near the entrance in the overspill burial ground. The net value of his estate was given as £15,344. He was succeeded by his son Percy Brooksbank.

Percy Brooksbank (1897-1952) was at Eton when war broke out in 1914. He went to Sandhurst but was prevented from getting a commission because of his health however he was more successful in the French army where he obtained the rank of captain and served as a driver with the French Red Cross.

He married Edith Kitchen in 1917 but the union was short lived because of his wife's pre and post marriage infidelities. In 1924 he married Annabelle Ralphs, daughter of George A. Ralphs the founder of Ralphs' grocery store, the largest food retailer in Southern California.

The wedding took place in the Pro Cathedral in Paris with guests such as Le Baronne De Viliers and as reported they later made their home in the South of France until such time as they can return to Middleton Hall which is temporarily leased.

In Kelly's Directory for 1921 Percy Arthur Brooksbank is given as the owner of the Hall and Charles Herbert Kitson as the resident and in 1929 Percy Brooksbank is still listed as the owner and F. Orlando Hellyer resident. The Hellyer family came from Brixham in the 1850's and established fishing interests in Hull and later came into possession of the Lambwath Farm estate near Sutton-on-Hull.

Percy travelled widely and a report of the death of his chauffeur Sidney Burkill in the New York Vandebilt hotel in 1924 confirms this. Sidney served in the First World War and his name is included on Middleton's Roll of Honour. Percy paid for his body to be embalmed and shipped back to Middleton for burial.

Percy's own obituary in an American newspaper states that he was a Rolls Royce racing driver, polo player and a member of the Royal Aero Club. He bred Arabian horses on his estate on the French Riviera and at Gaviota California. He also maintained herds of Aberdeen Angus and Guernsey cattle. In 1946 he commissioned a house at his 600 acre Folded Hills ranch at Gaviota from Lulah Maria Riggs the famous American architect where film star Sandra Bullock contracted her short lived marriage in 2005.

Percy died in 1952 and his ashes were interred in the Middleton cemetery.

In 1932 the Hall and estate were put on the market. The sale particulars state:

“Middleton Hall with gardens, grounds and plantation, stabling, garages and buildings; The Home Farm and Farm buildings, a pair of cottages and the wooded and secluded park.

The Hall is approached by a short drive from the Beverley Road and enjoys a south west aspect over the lawns and park.

The internal accommodation of the hall consists of:-

ON THE GROUND FLOOR

Outer and Inner Entrance Halls	Library
Dining Room	Billiard Room
Drawing Room	Study
Morning Room	Cloak Room and Lavatory.
Domestic Offices consisting of Servants' Hall;	
Butlers Pantry with built-in safe;	
Kitchen	Larder
Scullery	Dairies
Wine and Storage Cellars	Lavatories and other offices.

ON THE FIRST FLOOR

9 bedrooms	3 dressing rooms	2 bathrooms and WCs
Day nursery	Linen Room	

ON THE SECOND FLOOR

4 bedrooms and a bathroom.

There are main and secondary staircases and hot and cold water is supplied to the principal bedrooms.

There are compactly grouped round the courtyard 10 loose boxes, garage for 2 cars, fodderroom, saddle and harness rooms, coachhouse, 2 granaries, dairy and other buildings.

And there is a modern detached garage (heated) with accommodation for 4 cars. The water supply is from the chalk pumped by power laid on to the Hall and its buildings. The drainage is modern."

It was originally intended to sell the whole of the estate of 586 acres with annual rent of £1200 in one transaction but certain properties were withdrawn at the first auction.

The first sale in March 1932 comprised:

Mount Pleasant Farm	Robin Hood Inn and Land	Pant Garth Cottages and gardens.
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At the second sale in June the following were disposed of:

Middleton Hall and estate	Village Farm	Fox Covet Farm
Lammery House	Keeper's Cottage	House on Beverley Road.

In June of that year Dr Ernest Clements addressing the Middleton Club Feast sensed the change in the old order of things signalled the break up of the estate which had been built up by Colonel Brooksbank from an old Rectory by the acquisition of land and farms to be one of the finest small estates in the East Riding.

The Hall passed into the ownership of the Prince Smith family.

Sir Prince Smith Bart JP of Hillbrook, Keighley and of Southburn near Driffield was the head of Messrs Prince Smith & Son textile machinery makers, Keighley and died during the First World War leaving over one million pounds in his will. He was succeeded by his son Prince. His daughters had to make Southburn, Driffield their principal residence under the terms of the will.

He was succeeded as 2nd Baronet by his son Prince, 1869-1940, who was succeeded by his son William, 1869-1964. The fourth baronet, born 1928 died on 28th June 2007 at his home Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs, California with no surviving heir and consequently the title lapsed.

After the war the Prince Smiths were living at Southburn. The Hall which had been used by the army during the war was in a bad state. It was eventually demolished in 1960 a fate it shared with a number of large properties in the East Riding and the rest of the country. The cost of upkeep, the lack of staff and the general erosion of confidence of the upper classes caused by the change in the social attitudes all led to the loss of much fine property and an influential way of life.

What was the Hall like?

To get some idea of the atmosphere created by the smaller "stately home" perhaps a visit to Wassand Hall near Hornsea could be recommended. It opens at certain times in summer.

In her book “My Story – Winnie Cook” (Winifred Baker) the author has given us a glimpse of life “below stairs” at Middleton Hall in its later days which is worth quoting at length.

Extract from “MY STORY – WINNIE COOK”
(reproduced by kind permission of Mrs Cook)

“One day, dad came across when he brought the milk to be separated, we had a visit from the housekeeper at Middleton Hall. She would like me to call and see her on Saturday afternoon. As I had a piano lesson that afternoon I fitted in with it

Yes, I went to Middleton Hall to see Miss McKellar, who was to become a lifelong friend. She showed me round and invited me to tea. “Now, which job would you prefer: Housemaid, Parlourmaid or Kitchen?” I said “oh Kitchen” as I liked to be among food. “Very good and when can you start?” I said as I had no holiday I would like to start in a month, and that’s how it stood.....”

“So I set off for Middleton Hall, which was the easiest work I have ever had and the housekeeper was to teach me quite a bit. She was strict and fussy, but knew her job. It was often said that it took more to lay the table in her sitting room than for Lady Prince Smith – only joking.

Miss McKellar had a lot of experience both in cooking and housekeeping. We were treated with respect and treated as friends.

Lady Prince Smith gave me permission to practice on their piano which of course was a pleasure to use, better than ours.

The staff had a very nice sitting room, carpeted out with comfortable large room suite and large dining table where we met and ate. Our meal times were taken one hour earlier than that of the family, everything was well organised with no panic.

I joined the Girl Guides which met at Middleton Hall. We did tracking through the woods, we were taught about flags and different knots. We had parades on Sundays when special services were held joined by any of the forces which were stationed nearby.

After a while I enrolled into the First Aid Classes. Lady Prince Smith gave us some old pillow cases which I cut into bandages. We were Rota if there was an emergency. Luckily we never had any bombs dropped nearby.

Once a month my Grannie, from Lund, was invited to Sunday tea which was a nice change both for me and for Grannie. She came by bus from Lund at about 2 o’clock and would go home on the 9 o’clock bus. Miss McKellar was very hospitable to some. She would have the lady teachers for supper some evenings, and once asked my dad if he would like a look around the gardens, as she knew he liked gardening; so one Saturday night he duly turned up. My mother and little brother had already stayed for tea.

The gardens provided all the vegetable and fruit, also flowers. The greenhouses were full of fruit, peaches, grapes etc as well as tomatoes. We were very lucky with food: eggs, butter, milk and cream came from the farm at Southburn and when the shooting season started there was always plenty of game down in the cellar.

Nothing was ever wasted amongst food. Miss McKellar used to say “One can never claim to be a cook until you can make something out of nothing”. At first I didn’t understand, but as one gets older one can make a meal out of scraps. I have seen her with about 2 tablespoon of cooked rice pudding, whip up some cream, add it all and make dishes of rice cream with decorated tops for a sweet.

The staff was three regulars and when the family came from Keighley at the weekends, or sometimes once a fortnight, we would have extra help from the village. Getting all shipshape for family was a big job; the rooms were large, the landing once held the piano, we used to dance up there, but once all was cleaned and ship-shape and flowers arranged everywhere was a picture.

In the front hall stood a huge round Chinese table. It stood on the black and white tiled floor.

There were two wings: north and south, the south wing was used by the nurse and governesses, in the north wing was a huge airing room, a bedroom used by an evacuee school teacher, Mr Dakin from Hull and two bathrooms. Above that were some stairs and the sleeping quarters of about thirty evacuees. The long stretch of floor on both wings took some scrubbing, at least two days work.

The whole top flight of stairs was occupied by boys bed wise, the Billiard Room acted as dining hall, the food was cooked in what was originally the scullery. Two full-time village ladies cared and fed them.

After about six months a younger girl came and was put in the kitchen, so I was asked to go in the front way, I jumped into the position of parlourmaid. We had blue silk dresses and white aprons with big, wide strings you could tie big bows at the back”.