

The Development of the building through the ages

[Kevin] (0:00 - 7:43)

Welcome to the Calverley Old Hall, I'm Kevin Flittar and today I'd like to share with you the journey that Calverley Old Hall went through, to be considered historic. It all begins around the 12th century, or a family, who no, isn't actually called Calverley, the Scots they were called. They lived in Calverley so later they took the name of the place as their own, thus making them the Calverley family.

Then, around 1324, it is assumed from timber analysis that they built a stone and timber framed first floor hall with rooms below and fireplaces around. This, and so as the enlargement of the hall near the 1400s, was the first development of the Calverley Old Hall. Documents and, well, the house itself also tell us that the Calverley Old Hall definitely grew in status and wealth, many even being knighted, served as magistrates and as well as becoming County Sheriff.

Though they never really rose much higher than that, but some did stand out more than the rest, such as Sir Walter. He was someone who often clashed with the law and got in legal trouble for this. As the years went by, reaching around the 1480s, William Calverley married the wealthy Savile heiress and built the current Grand Hall, which was reserved for the family's private usage.

It was done with projecting hammerbeams, used to hold up the roofs. There's also an enormous fireplace in the centre of the room, which had a wall separating it, but is now fully unearthed. You can even see medieval windows still there and holes in the wall where windows would have been. This tells me that even today, the Grand Hall is still a large feat of architectural beauty.

But we jump to the 1500s. Imagine you are Sir William. The parlour room is nothing much but bricks, wooden archways and a bed. It pretty much just looks like every other room in, you know, Calverley Old Hall. But Sir William decides to upgrade it, and centuries later, and I mean that, later Landmark Trust discovers the painted chamber. From what I know, it's not known whether Sir William actually planned this to be found.

Either way, it is a part of the Calverley Old Hall that holds a large significance. Due to the culture that was displayed in the paintings during the time, including teathed birds and human figures, and a frieze of Tudor roses and pomegranates, which were associated with Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, which perhaps means that the Calverleys held some kind of importance in them. Jonathan Clarke, who inspected this painting, states that never in his own 27 years of working on historic buildings has he ever witnessed something like it.

But then, in April 1605, tragedy struck. Sir William's grandson, Walter Calverley, believed his wife was being unfaithful and had a lot of debt. He gruesomely murdered his two young sons, William and Walter. He would refuse to pledge guilty and even showed no remorse or regret for the actions, and he was therefore executed by pressing to death.

There have been a few plays written about this tragedy, and while at first people believed it to be Shakespeare who started these plays, it is now attributed to Thomas Middleton. Finally, Henry, the surviving son, was affected by this tremendously, which is very unsurprising. I mean, I couldn't imagine. But, reports and sources, they say, he was said to be a poignant person in his life, which, once again, very unsurprising.

But now, considering we are around the middle of the Calverley Old Hall's life, I think that I should mention that I do have two interviews I'd like to present, beginning with Vicky Thompson, the Engagement Manager of Landmark Trust, which is the organisation, slash charity, that owns the Calverley Old Hall. Due to circumstances, I was only able to do this interview by text, but I'll read it out.

Question 1. 'Do you believe that reviving the Calverley Old Hall was the right idea, and if so, how will this affect the future of the Calverley Old Hall?' Here is her answer:

"I definitely believe that reviving Calverley Old Hall was the right thing to do. It was essentially a ruin previously, and at real risk of being lost forever if the Landmark Trust hadn't stepped in to purchase the site in the 1980s, then worked tirelessly to find a suitable new use for the building. The revised site is multi-use, offering holiday accommodation in the main bulk of the building, a residential flat, and excitingly, a hireable Community Space in another part of the building.

These multiple uses will help to ensure the building stays sustainable into the future, in constant occupation, cared for, and well-maintained for many years to come."

Question 2. Why do you think the Calverley Old Hall has changed, developed, and still stayed throughout the years? What makes it so special? Here is her answer:

"As a medieval manor house, Calverley Old Hall was built with care and attention, with high-quality materials, by skilled craftspeople. This has allowed the structure of the building to survive the test of time. It was also the family home for the Calverley family, who were the local landowners for much of the building's history. They cared for it, expanded it, developed it to suit their changing needs, and according to their changing fortunes. Once the site was sold to the Thornhills in the 1700s, they converted it into cottages, and again, the building was home to lots of different families. This role as a home, right in the centre of Calverley Village, is probably the thing which has saved Calverley Old Hall over the years. Being able to revive the building recently and continue to offer it as a home, as a holiday home, and as a Community Space, will continue this tradition of people caring for it as a key building in the village."

Finally, could you explain your overall thoughts on the building? Anything you'd like to share about it? Here is her answer:

"Calverley Old Hall is a really special building. From the outside, it looks quite normal, just like a higgledy-piggledy combination of buildings."

Which, by the way, I had to search up what 'higgledy-piggledy' means, I did not know what that meant before this.

Anyway, "It doesn't look like it could possibly contain such a fantastic example of a Hammerby Roof, or the spectacular medieval painted chamber which was discovered in 2021. I think this magic and mystery is what makes it fascinating. One of my favourite things is when people visiting on our regular free public Open Days at Calverley Old Hall are amazed when they walk through the Great Hall and see the spectacular Hammerbeam Roof, and amazing modern handcrafted kitchen. That this spectacular building, with such a fascinating history and story to tell, exists right in the heart of Calverley Village."

Now, as you can see, Vicky and Landmark Trust have a lot of respect for the Calverley Old Hall, and are pretty experienced with it. But, for my second interview, I'd like to mention that this person has pretty much no idea what the Calverley Old Hall is, aside from a little bit of research. And while that might sound bad, I think it's a good opportunity, because we can compare the way two people might have a different outlook on something like this.

The questions are the same, but I was able to get him to record his responses, so here you go. Question 1. Do you believe that reviving the Calverley Old Hall was the right idea? And if so, how will this affect the future of the Calverley Old Hall?

[Interviewee] (7:44 - 8:13)

Hello, I think reviving the Calverley Old Hall is a good idea for the local economy. I think that it'll bring in some people to see, but really, it's not a very significant historical place, I guess. But yeah, sure, it is good for the town, you know, brings in tourists and stuff.

[Kevin] (8:14 - 8:22)

Question 2. Why do you think the Calverley Old Hall has changed, developed, and still stayed throughout the years? What makes it so special?

[Interviewee] (8:23 - 8:41)

I think what makes it special is the stories behind the place. From my research, I found out that there was a lot of different families that moved in, and even a murder that occurred there. This shows how many generations and centuries the house endured in. And it also shows the history behind it.

[Kevin] (8:41 - 8:48)

Last question. Finally, could you explain your overall thoughts on the building? Anything you'd like to share about it?

[Interviewee] (8:50 - 9:15)

Well, I personally don't know much about it, nor to be honest, care too much for it. I do see why people have a lot of respect for this place. It obviously has a lot of culture and history behind it, and it also shows the significance of the town and the townspeople. And from here, I just want to end. I appreciate you having me here, and goodbye.

[Kevin] (9:16 - 11:23)

From what we can see, there's a pretty big difference in responses. I think it's fair to say that some people might just not care too much for what they believe to be just a house. And that's, to me, okay, I can see where he's coming from, but I also believe that the house can be interesting when you take a deep look into it.

Which is why, to me, both of these interviews make me feel more open-minded to the different opinions on what can be considered 'history'. Is it really just the house, or is it a symbol of culture, growth, and change?

Anyway, let's get back to the Calverley Old Hall.

The Calverley Old Hall actually reopened in 2024, but before that, there was many small bits I'll touch on. In 1754, the Calverley Estate was actually sold to a different family, the Thornhills, which were a local family. This led to the Calverley Old Hall being divided into cottages.

Generations of cloth workers, labourers, and carpenters all lived there, though the cottage tenants didn't make any major alterations, which meant that the house remained completely the same. Which is very rare for a medieval house. Then, since 1981, the Calverley Old Hall has been owned by Landmark Trust, and its restoration costed £5 million.

For the many repairs, such as the ground floor, originally service rooms, becoming bedrooms and bathrooms, or a platform lift to enter the upstairs sitting room. And all throughout this, they held visits, activities, and workshops for the community. Finally, after around 43 years, it reopened in 2024.

The Calverley Old Hall is now restored, keeping its medieval architecture and significance, but now open to the public as the heart of the village.

So, what do you think? Just a building, or is it more than that? Is it a snippet of the past, captured in the present, and conserved for many years, with generations of stories that we might never even know? That's the part for you to figure out.

Before I go though, I really do suggest you listen to Leon's podcast, as it goes more in-depth into the family aspect of the Calverley Old Hall.

Thank you, and goodbye.