



The Landmark Trust

CALVERLEY OLD HALL – BRIEF HISTORY

A family called Scot was living in Calverley from the 1160s and later took the name of the place as their own. Around 1320, they built a stone and timber-framed house with a great hall on the first floor with service rooms below and fine stone fireplaces on both floors and decoratively carved roof trusses. A solar range (private quarters for the family) ran off at right angles to the west.

Documents and house together then tell a story of continuing growth in wealth and status as the Calverleys (the heirs all called William or Walter) added to their estates bit by bit and married into the leading families in the area. Many were knighted or served as magistrates and later as county sheriff. They never rose higher than that: they were county magnates, not national ones. Some stand out as individuals: Sir Walter, in the 1300s, was a vigorous improver, a pioneer of the iron industry.

In the 1480s, a William married a wealthy Savile heiress and built the current enormous hammer-beamed Great Hall with a great stone fireplace. Its 30-foot span was made possible by cantilevered hammerbeams, richly carved in the latest fashion. Fragments of the medieval windows can be seen in both north and south walls. The original entrance was at the west end, where there was a cross passage between two doors, behind a screen. The original first-floor hall now became a Solar Block. The same phase also saw the Chapel built, a very rare survival. It has a private gallery for the family, entered from the first floor solar (today's sitting room), a fine altar window (restored in the 1980s) and a miniature hammerbeam roof, very similar in its detailing to the Great Hall. A panelled oak ceiling covers the two bays at the altar end. The Chapel was cleared of cottage partitions and restored in the 1980s, when the one surviving light of the altar window was unblocked and the other two lights remade.

More is known about the 16th-century Calverleys as they navigated the difficult years of the Reformation. Chief among them is a William (?1507-72), who possibly joined the Pilgrimage of Grace, as he was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London for religious opposition in the 1530s, where he wrote a *Dyalogue* of repentance. He then embraced the Protestant regime, was knighted in 1545 and became Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1548-9. Sir William upgraded his father's Parlour Block, adding a moulded ceiling to the ground floor and a painted chamber above, discovered in 2021 under later lath and plaster. Covered in tightly planned outstanding grotesque-work wall paintings and dated stylistically to around 1560, this is a truly exceptional survival. In the next generation, the Lodging Block was added (dated to the 1590s), absorbing the much earlier solar range into its fabric.

Tragedy struck the family in April 1605, when this Sir William's great-grandson, Walter Calverley, ran amok, murdering his two small sons. He was executed by pressing to death. A play was written about this real-life Jacobean tragedy, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*. This was long attributed to Shakespeare but is now believed to be by Thomas Middleton. One son survived, Henry, who was an unlucky figure. His estate was exploited by his step-father in his youth and was burdened in the 1650s by a huge fine imposed by Parliament on Henry for being a Royalist during the Civil War.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website
www.landmarktrust.org.uk

The story of the Calverleys ends on a happier note. Sir Walter Calverley (1629-91) was the last of his family to have much to do with the Old Hall, though he chose not to live there but at Esholt Hall, having married its heiress Frances Thompson. His son, Sir Walter, 1st Baronet, married Julia Blackett of Wallington in Northumberland, and they rebuilt Esholt Hall in 1706. Their son the 2nd Baronet left Yorkshire to take up residence on his mother's estate at Wallington, marrying Julia Orde Blackett on condition he took the Blackett name. In 1754 the Calverley estate was sold to Thomas Thornhill of Fixby and the Old Hall was divided into cottages, including the Chapel and the vast volumes of the Great Hall and Solar Block. Many generations of cloth workers, labourers, cobblers and others lived on the site. Barns and stables which stood around it gradually disappeared as gardens and orchards were replaced by streets and houses. But the cottage tenants had no reason to make major alterations, so the shell of the medieval house remained intact, a rare and complete survival.

REPAIR & RENEWAL

1980s In 1977, the north wing was gutted by fire and in 1981, the entire site was put up for sale in three separate lots by the Thornhill Estate. The Landmark Trust bought this important medieval house to keep it in single ownership, its restoration always planned to be carried out in several phases. In 1982-3, as a first step, a Landmark holiday let was formed from two empty cottages at the north end that had been gutted by the fire. Life tenancies in other cottages were left to play out. The envelopes of the Chapel and Great Hall were also repaired. The Solar Block and the Great Hall still contained the remains of eighteenth-century dwellings which Landmark was not permitted to remove by the authorities. They were kept wind- and weathertight by Landmark while their future use was decided.

2018-24 That decision came to a head when major maintenance was required in 2017. Landmark held an architectural competition, for a scheme to bring the whole building back into use by making a new, larger Landmark for up to ten people in all but the Chapel and Lodging Block (this last now became a community space on the ground floor and a one-bedroomed flat on the first floor). The approach was to be contemporary, since the building has changed so much over the centuries, making it impossible to choose a single period to 'restore' it back to. The competition was won by Cowper Griffiths Architects of Cambridge. In 2021, with help from the Culture Recovery Fund, the roof was repaired. The main works followed on from 2022 and were completed in 2024, thanks to grants from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Culture Recovery Fund and generous support from other grants, trusts, gifts in wills and a remarkable 2,005 individual donations.

Throughout, the conversion of the gutted spaces has been carried out so that the archaeology of the ancient walls and timbers is still legible. The Great Hall is now used as a dining room and kitchen. The Solar has become a sitting room, with bedrooms and bathrooms beneath, and the Chapel remains a place for quiet contemplation and information. Outside, the grounds were re-landscaped to improve biodiversity and a community garden has been created with input from local residents, including a stone sculpture, carved with motives to represent all aspects of the project. The building is heated by ground source energy, supplied by six deep bore holes. Care was taken to maximise accessibility, providing a level-access ground floor bedroom and bathroom, a specially designed kitchen and a lift.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays to pay for their future maintenance. Calverley Old Hall sleeps up to 10 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk.

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