

Alkrington Manor and Hall

From my time in England I have quite a number of pictures of many regions associated with my search. Many pictures for this chapter are very dark, particularly of Alkrington grounds, but they are included. One is of the great Bell that hung



on the roof of the Hall and as described by Aunt Kate, 'The Levers of that age were methodical and punctual, so that when the bell of Alkrington Hall rang out the hour, calling people to refreshment and rest from labour, you can imagine that the workers on the Estate, (which were very considerable at that time), if they had watches pulled them out from their pockets to verify the

hour"

The bell has an inscription but this copy is not readable.

Other items such as china would have been kept in the Hall. They are described in the chapter on Great Aunt Kate.

A survey of 1212 gives the earliest account of the Manor at Alkrington when it was held by Adam de Prestwich.

It passed through many families before being sold by the Legh family to Robert and John Lever in 1627.

There is a curious cave in the Manor grounds. Carved on the ground is a set of words:

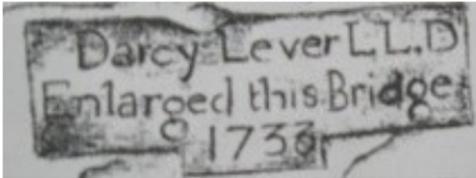
Life	Fraile
Death	Certain
Heaven	Happiness
Hell	Torments

Three open stone coffins are hewn in the solid rock that forms the floor of the cave. Above the door, inside is the date 1675 and outside over the door, Robert Lever.

Darcy Lever inherited the Alkrington Estate in 1718 at the age of fifteen.

In the valley of the Wince Brook he (Darcy) built three farmhouses which all carried the inscription 'D.L.D. 1731 '. Two

years later a cottage was built in Alkrington Park. The old bridge over the River Irk, which carried the drive from the old Manchester to Rochdale turnpike to the hall, was widened and a stone built into the downstream side of the bridge. It commemorates this and the degree of LL.D., conferred on Darcy on 11 July 1733.



The River Irk



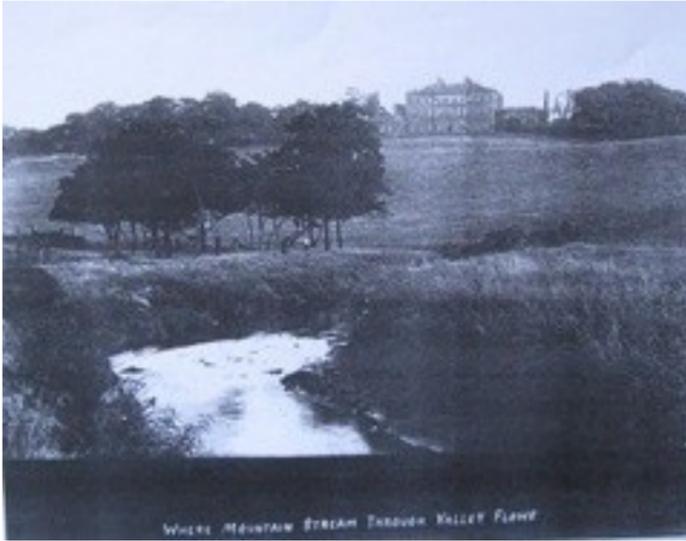
The Lever family went on to buy several surrounding estates making them one of the wealthiest families in the south of Lancashire.

On the death of his father (Sir Darcy Lever, in 1743), Ashton Lever, at the age of thirteen came into possession of the Manor and Hall. The last family member, John Lever, died with no heirs in 1834 and the Hall and estate was sold to Lees Esquire of Manchester in 1844.

Sir Darcy Lever rebuilt the old Alkrington Hall, amidst the woods overlooking Heaton Park, in 1735-36 in the same year that he enlarged the bridge over the River Irk. The architect was Giacomo Leoni. It is considered to be an important and imposing example of Leoni's work and one of only a few which survive in the North West of England.



It was designed according to English fashion for tall brick houses. The situation was formerly one of much picturesqueness, being on elevated ground, and despite many changes in the surroundings it still retains some of its former characteristics.



The River Irk "Where mountain stream through valley flows"



Hall in the background and children playing on the lawn

In 1942 the Hall came into the possession of the local council and was in time converted into bedsits to be rented out. Then a decision was made by the council to sell the building. The tenants were rehoused and the house was purchased in 1993 by James and Robert Pickup, builders of Middleton who restored and converted the Hall into three luxury private dwellings.

In the early 1950's it was described as a 'sharply defined rectangular block of bright red brick, solidly built, and appearing as structurally sound now as when new.' The general effect of the principal front is now somewhat spoiled by the removal of the old window bars and the substitution of plate glass, but it is still one of much dignity.

This has been something of a loss to the people of Middleton to have a historic Hall inaccessible due to privatization. However, apart from this, little else has changed. The Hall still sits

within Alkrington Woods. It overlooks the Irk Valley and from the front of the hall a wide view of the country can be obtained as far as Middleton, Manchester, Salford and Prestwich. It is surrounded by miniature wood that in summer months is rich in plant and animal wildlife and can still be viewed in all its splendour.



Alkrington Hall crest resting on fireplace in Pickup home

Originally it graced a place over the entrance to the Hall. Confusion reigned supreme for me on discovering in my explorations that there were townships called not only Great Lever and Little Lever but also Darcy Lever. These were all townships not people!!

John Pickup was generous in showing cousin Keith and myself a section of the Hall when we were there in 1996. John was still sorrowing over the recent loss of his brother.

As well as information from the internet some of the above is from a booklet I acquired while in England. It is titled

“The Restoration and conversion of Alkrington Hall, Middleton.”

1993-5

Keith Harden

It is dedicated to Robert Pickup, the builder who had recently died.

Although an internet site stated that in 1950 the Hall was in excellent shape, this booklet reads that the grounds were heavily overgrown and the Hall in a poor state. The booklet sheds detailed light on the many changes Alkrington Hall went through over the years.

There can be no doubt that Sir Ashton built up the wings of the Hall to house his museum. In 1772 there was upwards of 1,300 glass cases, placed in three rooms, besides four sides of rooms shelved from top to bottom with glass doors before them. A visitor described the museum as occupying four large rooms ranging almost the whole front of the building.

When the museum moved to London in October 1774 the Hall would have reverted to domestic use. Sir Ashton returned there to permanent residence in 1787 but died the following year, leaving his widow, Dame Frances living on in the Hall until her death in 1802. The estate passed to a nephew, John Lever and this branch of the family retained the Hall until 1845.

A minimum of information has been taken from the thirty-one-page booklet. Interested family members will be able to read more for themselves.

I have a brochure with a map titled The Alkrington Woods Trail. It has sketches and descriptions of trees, shrubs and plants to be seen at each of the Twelve Points marked. Mentioned are beech, silver birch, hawthorn, larch and many more. Presumably all these were brought in over the years by Sir Darcy, making the grounds into one of unequalled beauty.