

Bowcliffe Hall

1

1805 Land purchased , and house building begun by Manchester cotton spinning magnate **William Robinson** . He completed only the West wing before going bankrupt. Estate bought shortly afterwards by **John Smyth** for £2000.

1825 House and gardens completed . Two nearby cottages bought from local innkeeper [The Fox ?].

1840 John Smyth died [committed suicide ?] and the estate passed in trust to his two sisters , Lydia Osbourne and Catherine Mason , neither of whom lived here.

1841 ' The Mansion ' was bought by **George Lane Fox** [known as **The Gambler**] who had been living at Bramham House after the gutting of Bramham Park in 1828. [See poster advertising sale.]

1848 George " the Gambler " died , succeeded by his eldest son " **Squire** " George. As The Park was still in ruins , he continued to live at what they now called **Bramham Hall** [causing the ancient house in the village now to be re - styled Bramham Old Hall].

1896 " Squire " George died , succeeded by his second son .[The first having relinquished his right by becoming a Roman Catholic priest -- though he soon changed his mind , marrying twice and producing 10 children , but too late to regain his inheritance !] The new owner , **George Richard Lane Fox** [who was to retrieve the family title previously held as Lord Bingley -- it disappeared again within a generation owing to there being no son to inherit] , began to rebuild The Park .

1906 With the Lane Foxes back at The Park , Bowcliffe lay empty.

1908 The House was bought by **W. Geoffrey Jackson**.

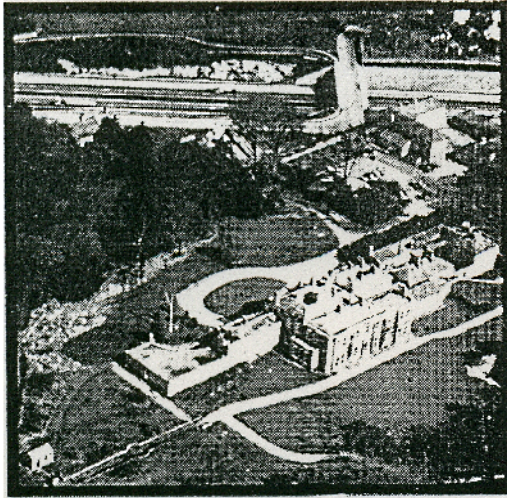
2

1920 **Captain Robert Blackburn**, the aviation pioneer, bought Bowcliffe Hall, living there as a nationally and internationally known figure, and a leader in village affairs, for 35 years, though his marriage to the lively Jessica, equally well-known and passionate about flying, ended in 1936, she leaving Bramham. [See the 1995 obituary recording her death, aged 101, which contains details of both their lives.]

1955 Robert Blackburn died.

1956 The Hall was bought by the fuel company **Hargreaves** as their main offices. By 2000 it was still the headquarters of what had become **Bayford Thrust**, and the offices of its Chairman and Managing Director, David Turner. The company is an independent international fuel supplier, buying, processing, transporting and selling coal, oil and petroleum; it owns a fleet of oil tankers and its own Thrust garages. [See accompanying leaflets.] It also hires out Bowcliffe Hall for professional and private functions.

By 2000, alterations to the Hall and its out-buildings, together with the 1995 extensions [see plans], had enabled there to be other companies sharing the site as Bayford tenants [see separate list] -- 20 companies, in fact, generating a carpark in which 80 vehicles park on a daily basis.



AS WE look through the great windows of Bowcliffe Hall across the peaceful downs it is hard to believe that this was the scene of two great battles in the 15th and 17th centuries.

In the year 1403, Hotspur, son of the Earl of Northumberland, was killed at the battle of Shrewsbury. Upon hearing of the death of his son the earl went to see the king, Henry IV, and after promising to submit to his rule was pardoned, and released without punishment. A few years later, however, the Earl raised another army and started a rebellion. He came down to Yorkshire and met the King at the battle of Bramham Moor, where he was at last defeated and killed.

Some 200 years later, in 1644, the Civil War between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians was well under way. Both sides were weak and needing extra help, so the Royalists obtained part of the Irish Army and the Parliamentarians part of the Scottish Army. In the meantime, however, Cromwell was training farmers' sons in and around the district of Bowcliffe Hall: these young farmers were accustomed to riding and were ideal for cavalry. The climax came at the Battle of Marston Moor when Cromwell, at the head of the Ironsides, defeated the Royalists.

About the year 1805 William Robinson bought the land in the region of Bramham and began to build Bowcliffe Hall. He was a cotton spinner from Manchester, and unfortunately went bankrupt soon after work on the house had commenced, with the result that he had to sell the house as it stood (the present west wing). The purchaser was John Smyth and the price involved was

£2,000. Smyth then set to work on completing the house and forming the garden, and in 1819 he purchased the two cottages overlooking the Great North Road from the innkeeper of Bramham. When he died in 1840 the house passed into the hands of his sisters, Lydia Osbourne and Catherine Mason; they never lived in the house, but it was put into trust by them until such time as it could be sold.

The house was bought by George Lane Fox of Bramham Park, the Park having been destroyed by fire in 1828. He died in 1848, leaving debts amounting to £175,000, and his eldest son, also George, succeeded him. He was known over most of Yorkshire as "The Squire", and it is said that he used to drive the London/Glasgow mail coach. He was a great sportsman, and in the same year he had the Bramham Moor hounds returned to their native village from Harewood, where they had been kept since the death of James Fox in 1821. The Squire died in 1896 and was succeeded by his second son, as the elder had decided to devote his life to religion. Lord Bingley, whilst living at Bowcliffe, started work on the rebuilding of Bramham Park, and the Lane Fox family eventually moved there in 1906, although James died the previous year.

Bowcliffe Hall was empty for a short time, but in 1908 was taken over by a Mr. W. G. Jackson. Although it is known that he lived in the house for about 12 years no other records are available.

The last private owner of Bowcliffe Hall was Mr. Robert Blackburn who purchased the house in 1920. He was a famous aircraft pioneer, connected with the North Sea Aerial Navigation Company; Chairman of Blackburn Aircraft Ltd., and founder of the Flag School at Brough for the training of officers of the Air Reserve. In 1912 he built a one-seater two-engine plane which is today the oldest British aeroplane still flying. He was also the owner of a plane which won the "War of the Air Trophy", presented by the Yorkshire Evening Post. Although Mr. Blackburn was connected with aircraft all his life he never took out a pilot's licence. He died in 1955, and in May, 1956 Bowcliffe Hall was taken over by Hargreaves, and although converted into offices it has not lost the stately atmosphere of an old country house.