

## A SHORT HISTORY OF HOLDSWORTH HOUSE

'A fine example of a Calder Valley yeoman's hall of the immediate post medieval period.' This is how the National Civic Trust described Holdsworth House in 1989 when we won an award for the guest bedroom extension.

The site on which the house now stands was first mentioned in documents as far back as 1272 when the de Aldworth family paid 6 old pence for 2½ acres of land in the hamlet. The place gave its name to a family of wealth and distinction including the rich but unfortunate Vicar of Halifax, Dr Robert Haldsworth, who was murdered by thieves at Halifax vicarage and is buried in the south chapel of the magnificent Parish Church. His descendant, William, built a timber house with a thatched roof on the site in 1435.

The present stone house was probably built in 1598 although the date stone above the front porch bears the initials and date A.B. 1633. Abraham Brigg certainly owned the house about this time but he is said to have wasted his estate and given way to drink. In 1657 he sold it to Henry Wadsworth of Luddenden and went to keep an alehouse in the town. The Wadsworth family retained possession for more than two hundred years until 1877.

John and Deborah Wadsworth built a new barn in 1689 and their date stone I.W.D 1680 can be seen on the west porch of the courtyard. The barn was re-built in 1897 by their descendent Richard Wadsworth. In 1837 the last direct descendent, Elisabeth, died and the property passed to a distant relation, Matthew Ayrton, who changed his name to Wadsworth to comply with the terms of Miss Wadsworth's will.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the house was divided into two dwellings and let to tenants. There were only three or four further owners until the Pearson family bought the house in 1963 and turned it into the 'Cavalier Country Club'.

The Cavalier was an exclusive member's club of the kind popular in the early 1960s and proved an immediate success. The membership numbered over a thousand with an annual fee of seven guineas. The restaurant was used by local businessmen to entertain their visiting customers and they encouraged Rita and Freddie Pearson to build accommodation at the rear of the old house. Over the years the original eight bedrooms have gradually increased to forty.

Many celebrities have stayed at Holdsworth, the most famous being the Beatles on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1964, John Lennon's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Pearson family had to vacate their own rooms in the house to accommodate the Fab Four and their manager, Brian Epstein. The staff were sworn to secrecy because Mrs Pearson was afraid the gardens would be trampled by thousands of screaming fans. John and Ringo slept in what is now an office and Paul and George were in the present day Ayrton Room. Two of the beds are still in use in the hotel.

Other famous celebrities include: Jayne Mansfield, Sir Alex Douglas Home, The Small Faces, Cilla Black, Cliff Richards, The Searchers, Victoria Wood, Rudolph Nureyev, Bill Connolly, Johnny Briggs - alias Mike Baldwin, REM, Dave Stewart and the Maharaja of Baroda, an old friend of Freddie Pearson.

Rita Pearson died in 1981 and Freddie in 1989. The name was changed to Holdsworth House Hotel and Restaurant to better reflect the character of the business and continues in the hands of their daughters.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

The cross on the east gable is of particular interest. This cross denotes that at some distant time the estate was in the hands of the ancient Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem. Such properties had to display the cross or be fined until it was replaced. Estates in the order contributed to the welfare of the Crusaders and houses bearing this ornament were said to be 'under the cross'.

There is a great deal of fine oak furniture which was purchased by the Pearsons in the 1960's when it was not so fashionable and Freddie thought he had been robbed if he paid more than £5 for one of the fine carved chairs which are still used in the restaurant.

At the top of the stairs on the right are three wig cupboards set into the wall which probably date from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century - their purpose is self-explanatory.

The Witches Cupboard in the Mullioned Room was also bought from Maurice Godstone of Bakewell, a well known antique dealer, who supplied most of the oak furniture. Rita Pearson found one half in his storeroom and the other door was being used by a builder as a board for mixing cement. It dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the symbols are Masonic.

The delightful four gabled Gazebo at the corner of the sunken garden was probably built a little later than the house and there are several suggestions as to its original use. It was either built simply as a summerhouse or a gatekeeper's house but it could also have been an oratory (small private chapel). There is a legend that a tunnel ran from the main house to the Gazebo and was used during times of religious persecution. There may well have been a 'priest hole' behind one of the fireplaces in the main house. The two weeping ash trees in the front garden were planted by Miss Wadsworth in 1821.

Over the years there have been several sightings of 'ghosts' most frequently in the Ayrton Room which was originally the main bedchamber of the house. However, when Derek Acorah, the television psychic, stayed recently he did not pick up any signs that the house was haunted.

To commemorate our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the Millennium it was decided to restore the period gardens at the front to the house. The design was taken from John Parkinson's book '@A garden of Pleasant Flowers' published in 1629 and the planting includes many contemporary flowers and shrubs. A local junior school put together a time capsule which was buried beneath the sun dial.