

# Our Heritage

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WOOD HALL  
HOTEL & SPA  
WETHERBY, WEST YORKSHIRE

## Origins

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At the time of the Norman Conquest, Wood Hall and its co-manor Hazelwood, were occupied by two brothers. The two men, with the help of the Danes, drove the Normans out of York in 1067 - an act which brought the vengeance of William the Conqueror - and the devastation of him, in Yorkshire in 1070. Because of this, William placed in these two manors two of his 'Vavasours' meaning valiant gentlemen, a title immediately below that of a Knight. For 650 years the Vavasours lived at Wood Hall.

In Medieval times, Wood Hall chase was widely famed for its good venison: on different occasions men of good standing were called by the Vavasours to answer for trespassing in the pursuit of game in their park at Wood Hall.



Wood Hall was originally situated right on the banks of the River Wharfe, which flows through the hotel grounds. During the Civil War, Cromwell's army destroyed the buildings and threw the stonework into the river. It was only during this century that some of the stonework was recovered and the House of York coat of arms can be seen as decoration in the front hall of the hotel.

# Early Wood Hall

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The present building was erected in 1750, designed by the famous Yorkshire architect John Carr, when it passed into the hands of the Scott family of Scott Hall, Leeds, who owned Sicklinghall (hence the village pub, The Scott's Arms). The Oak Room Bar in the modern day Wood Hall was originally the Dining Room, and still features the magnificent original oak panelling. At the side of the fireplace you can see a push bell, most likely used to call the servants. Some of the cottages were built in the reign of James 1st. The present dining room in the Jacobean wing was formerly part of the out-house on the Vavasour estate and therefore, dates back to that period.

The house passed through multiple family members and was leased in 1910 for 21 years to Mr CM Watson, a woollen manufacturer from Morley. Various alterations were made to the house around this time and these can be viewed on a plan currently displayed at the entrance to the Oak Room Bar. One of our bedrooms, the Manton Room, is named after another previous owner, Mr Joseph Watson (later Lord Manton - "Soapy Joe's"). He was chairman of Joseph Watson & Sons Ltd, soap manufacturers of Leeds, and a director of the London and North-Western Railway.



## Boy's Prep School

It was kept in the family until 1911 and remained a family home until 1935 when it became a boy's prep school. The current Drawing Room was the former school's Library, where quiet studying took place. You can see some of the many bookshelves that surrounded the room, and the grand fireplace that kept the room warm on a winter evening. The Georgian Restaurant was initially the school's Day Room, which was the main schoolroom and where the boys would have sat on the floor for assemblies.



A number of well-known Yorkshire families sent their sons to the school including Sir Len Hutton, the Yorkshire and England cricketer. The reminiscences of former pupils give a glimpse of what life was like at the school, "Each boy was given a cricket ball in the summer term, his school number cut into the leather in Roman numerals and woe betide you if you could not produce the ball on request".

Ex-pupils of the school remember the headmaster, Mr Catlow, as quite a character. He had spent a period before World War II teaching in Germany, including being tutor to President Hindenburg's son. He was a keen sailor and took charge of one of the small boats that went to the rescue of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk in 1940, an exploit which no doubt captured the admiration of the boys in his school.

## Religious Significance

In 1966, Wood Hall became the first pastoral and ecumenical centre in Britain, counting Mother Teresa of Calcutta among its first visitors. Father Buckley said of the centre, "It will be the first of its kind on this scale in the country. Its object is to bring the renewal of the Church's life to all Catholics, other Christians and non-Christians. It will be primarily a spiritual Christian Centre". A Carmelite monastery is now situated to the rear of Wood Hall.

## From Vietnam to North Yorkshire

Wood Hall was host to Vietnamese boat people arriving in the UK after the Vietnam War. People in Sicklinghall were among those who rallied around to help with the clothing and other essentials needed by these people who had lost everything.

As well as material items, locals also became "befrienders", where they would visit a Vietnamese family staying at Wood Hall and invite them into their own homes. A highlight for the English families was an invitation to join their celebration of the Chinese New Year at Wood Hall, complete with dragon. So it was that events happening in a remote country sent ripples half way around the world to affect lives in the little village of Linton.

# Georgian Restaurant Paintings

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Clockwise from the left of the main entrance:

## **Edmond Halley**

Edmond Halley, (1656 – 1742) was an English astronomer, geophysicist, mathematician, meteorologist, and physicist who is best known for computing the orbit of the eponymous Halley's Comet. He was the second Astronomer Royal in Britain, following in the footsteps of John Flamsteed.

## **William Blake**

William Blake (1757 –1827) was an English poet, painter, and printmaker. Largely unrecognised during his lifetime, Blake now holds a reputation as a seminal figure in the history of both the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic Age.

Considered mad by contemporaries for his idiosyncratic views, Blake is held in high regard by later critics for his expressiveness and creativity, and for the philosophical and mystical undercurrents within his work.

## **William Gladstone**

William Ewart Gladstone, (29 December 1809 – 19 May 1898), was a British liberal statesman. In a career lasting over sixty years, he served as Prime Minister four separate times, more than any other person. Gladstone was also Britain's oldest Prime Minister, 84 years old when he resigned for the last time. He had also served as Chancellor of the Exchequer four times.

## **Rosamond Sargent**

Rosamund Sargent, née Chambers, was the sister of Ephraim Chambers who published his Cyclopaedia (the earliest English encyclopaedia) in 1728. Her marriage in 1749 to John Sargent of Halstead Place in Kent provided the occasion for Allan Ramsay to paint this likeness of her and a companion portrait of her husband. It was painted by Allan Ramsay.

## **Anne Bayne**

Anne Bayne was wife of the painter Allan Ramsay. Ramsay set the portrait of his wife within a painted oval. His careful handling of the play of light and shadow creates the illusion of a real person existing in palpable space. It reflects his careful observation and creates a freshness and vivacity unmatched in his earlier portraits. The stiffness of Anne's pose suggests this is an early work, probably painted in Edinburgh at the time of the couple's engagement. They married in 1739 and Anne died four years later giving birth to their third child.

## **Mary Beale**

Mary Beale (née Cradock) (26 March 1632–1699) was an English portrait painter. She became one of the most important portrait painters of 17th century England, and has been described as the first professional female English painter. She became a semi-professional portrait painter in the 1650s and 1660s.

## **George Stubbs**

George Stubbs (1724 – 1806) was classified in his lifetime as a sporting painter. He is best remembered for his paintings of horses and his conversation pieces. Having studied anatomy, Stubbs's pictures of horses are among the most accurate ever painted, but his work is lyrical and transcends naturalism.

Stubbs was born in Liverpool, the son of a leather worker, and he spent his early career in the north, painting portraits and developing his interest in anatomy. In the later 1740s he lived in York and supplied the illustrations for a treatise on midwifery.

# Present day

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Since the opening of Wood Hall as a hotel, the courtyard wing has replaced the stables and outbuildings to the west of the main house. In 1992 a further wing to the east was added to incorporate spa facilities.

Today Wood Hall is owned and operated by Hand Picked Hotels, and its guests create the next chapter of a fascinating history. Be sure to explore the rest of this historic building, and wander around its beautiful grounds.

## Wood Hall Hotel & Spa

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