

Wycoller Hall

& the Cunliffe Family

It is believed that Wycoller 'Hall' was built by Peter or Piers of the Hartley family at some point in the 16th century. When his daughter Elizabeth married Nicholas Cunliffe in 1611 the 'Hall' passed into the ownership of the Cunliffe family of Hollins near Accrington.

Nicholas and Elizabeth had five children, John, Nicholas, Ellis, Robert and Elizabeth between 1612 and 1627.

John Cunliffe - the next in line - married Grace Hartley in 1628. They had a daughter - Elizabeth - but unfortunately both mother and daughter died in 1636. John married again in April 1638 to second wife Mary Chetham of Manchester. They had eleven children and moved to Hollins near Accrington.

With the outbreak of the English Civil War the Cunliffe family was firmly on the side of Parliament. The Hundred of Blackburn, which included Marsden, Colne and Trawden supported Parliament, but a large part of Lancashire including the important towns of Preston and Lancaster supported the King's cause. John's father Nicholas Cunliffe was appointed one of the four captains of the Colne troops. After the Civil war he became a member of the Presbyterian form of church government in Lancashire along with his sons John, Nicholas and Robert. John's mother and brothers Ellis & Nicholas continued to live in Wycoller until at least 1660.

Although the Hall appeared to have remained reasonably intact until the early 1900's much of it was unoccupied and neglected. Stone was subsequently plundered for other buildings. The ornamental porch went first to Trawden and then to Foulridge, while flagstones and steps have been used in local walls.

Under the ownership of the Water Board the village fell in to disrepair and The Friends of Wycoller were established in 1948 with the aim of preserving the village and in particular the Hall. Some restoration work began in 1950, principally the rebuilding of the fireplace. The land remained in the Water Board's ownership until 1973 when it was purchased by Lancashire County Council. The village was declared a conservation area and 350 acres of the surrounding farmland were designated a Country Park. The Hall ruins are both a Scheduled Monument and a Grade II listed Building.



Little is known of Nicholas Cunliffe, eldest son of John Cunliffe, apart from the fact that he had a son John Cunliffe who was born in 1670.

John married Dorothy Wood and had four children; Nicholas, Henry, William and Elizabeth. John never lived in Wycoller Hall but would have visited for hunting and seeing relatives.

His eldest son Nicholas moved to Wycoller Hall in 1723 after losing 'Hollins' the ancestral home of the Cunliffes, thus limiting the Cunliffe estate to Wycoller. He died shortly afterwards, leaving the Hall to his brother, Henry. Henry Cunliffe was described as a sea captain, having sailed to the Americas and Guinea before his return to Wycoller. (see, Ghosts & Legends-Black Bess).

Nicholas, Henry and William all died without issue, so Wycoller Hall passed to their sister's grandson, Henry Owen, on condition that he took the family name.

Elizabeth Cunliffe had married John Scargill, with whom she had a child, Sarah (Sally) Scargill. (see bridges of Wycoller).

When John died, she took a second husband - Thomas Eyre - with whom she had two children: Elizabeth (Betty) Eyre and Thomas Eyre.

Sarah Scargill married Joseph Owen in 1746, and they had two children;

Henry Owen (alias Henry Owen Cunliffe) and Charles Owen (alias Charles Cunliffe Owen).

Henry was just 21 when he became the new squire of Wycoller Hall. He soon fitted in with wine and dining with neighbours. Henry was not very impressed with the "yeoman" type Hall that had satisfied his predecessors. He aspired to a hall fit for the role he intended to play. He longed for a home to rival those of his new friends, and wished to marry a woman of standing. He knew he would have to make an attractive residence to attract a wealthy bride to Wycoller. A porch with ornate finials, a new range of mullioned windows including a fine Venetian window in the south tower, a large ancient-style fireplace, interiors to be modernised. The farm-like surroundings of the Hall were to be laid out as gardens and the Aisled Barn was to be converted into a coach house. Setting his plans into action he moved into the Red Lyon public house for a year while work was completed.

While on Militia exercises in Manchester in the May of 1775, Henry met Mary Oldham; the daughter of Adam Oldham a wealthy hat manufacturer. Totally smitten by both Mary and her financial prospects, he proposed and a wedding was quickly planned. By the August of the same year they were married. The building work at the Hall had luckily been completed for their return, having taken 18 months to complete. Henry was known locally as "the Baron" in recognition of his ambitious life style and in mockery of his short stature and pompous manner. He was a keen sportsman, enjoying, shooting and fishing, but most of all cock-fighting, which later became his passion. There is even evidence of a cock-fighting pit in what had been the garden of Wycoller Hall (now the picnic area next to the pond). With a lifestyle beyond his means and a heavy gambling habit the 'Squire' soon got into debt.

When Henry died in 1818 he made his nephew Charles Cunliffe Owen his heir, but due to the fact that Henry had mortgaged and borrowed heavily on his estate the debts could not be repaid and the Wycoller estate became split up between the mortgages. For many years the main part of the estate was in the possession of John Oldham the only son of Hannah Oldham, sister of Henry Owen Cunliffe's wife Mary. It later passed to the Rev. John Roberts Oldham who sold the doors, windows, roofing timbers and some stone to support the building of a cotton mill in Trawden.

drawing of Wycoller Hall 1819

