

Historic Houses of West Yorkshire

Bolling Hall, Bradford



The south front of Bolling Hall, shown in the drawing above, provides the best viewpoint for understanding the growth of the house since the Middle Ages. At first glance the building has a symmetrical appearance: in the centre there is a hall with a large central window and two smaller windows positioned centrally above it; on each side there are matching doorways and matching windows above. The hall is flanked by projecting bays which, though with different kinds of windows, balance each other, and at both ends of the building the wings are fronted by three-storey towers. But this balance was, in fact, achieved only after several centuries of development; it was contrived by adding new structures to the existing group of late medieval buildings. For example, the doorway on the right-hand side of the hall leads nowhere: it backs on to a chimney stack. It is there for its visual effect, not for use.

The earliest surviving part of the Hall is the tower on the left. It was erected by the Bolling family - local landowners - in the late 14th or 15th century; though impossible to date closely, it is one of a number of towers erected at that period by northern



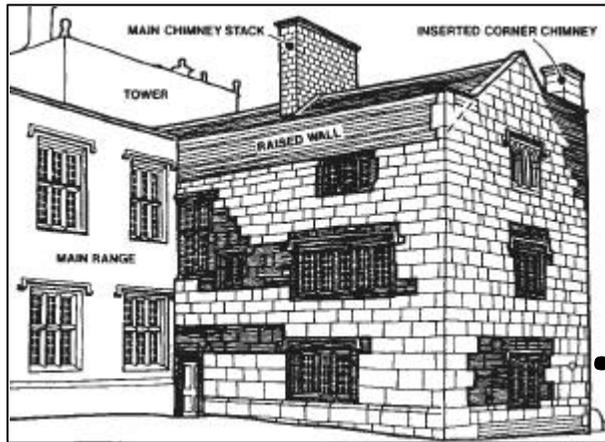
lords. With a large entrance at ground level and wooden rather than stone floors it was probably intended more to convey an impression of the Bolling family's importance, rather than to provide them with serious protection from attack. Nevertheless, the ground on the west (left-hand) side of the tower slopes steeply away, offering a good natural defence, and the residence may have been protected on its other sides by a wall and ditch.

The tower would not have stood alone in the Middle Ages: there was almost certainly a timber hall on the right, as well as various other buildings behind the tower. The hall would have been the focus of the residence, whereas the tower contained on its upper floors the private apartments of the lord and his immediate family. These rooms were provided with latrines in an angle tower (on the left of the drawing); they also had fireplaces in the east (right-hand) wall, although that on the first floor has since been obliterated, along with the original windows in both rooms. The ground floor of the tower was used for other purposes, perhaps for storage.

In the 15th century there was probably a passage way just to the right of the tower, running through the range and separating the tower from the hall. The hall itself would have had walls much lower than those of the existing range; some of its timbers have been re-used in the present building, and are described on the other side of this leaflet. The stone hall and the rooms between it and the medieval tower date to the early

17th century: the room behind the upper bay window has a particularly fine plaster ceiling of this period. The wing to the right of the hall is mainly of the 17th century, except for the bay between the hall and tower which was erected in the late 18th century to the design of a noted York architect, John Carr. The hall was probably remodelled at about the same time, the gallery being raised to give better access to the new rooms.

The west wing, shown above, adjoins the north face of the medieval tower. It was not the first building on this part of the site: changes in stonework at the north-west corner of the tower (to be seen on the far side of the wing) suggest that an earlier, probably timber building was once attached to it. But the present wing seems itself to have been built before the end of the Middle Ages. Its original walling can be seen, again, on the far side of the wing: thin, roughly-coursed sandstone like that used in the tower. On this side, however, the north and east walls were later refaced with large gritstone blocks, neatly coursed. Of all the windows in this wing only one - the top one in the gable end - seems to have been put in at the same time as the refacing; it can be dated by its style to the early 16th century. All the others are insertions: the drawing indicates by shading where the walls have been disturbed to accommodate them. They were probably inserted in the 17th century, when floor levels were altered, and when the great arched fireplace, below the main chimney stack, was installed to provide the Hall with new kitchens.

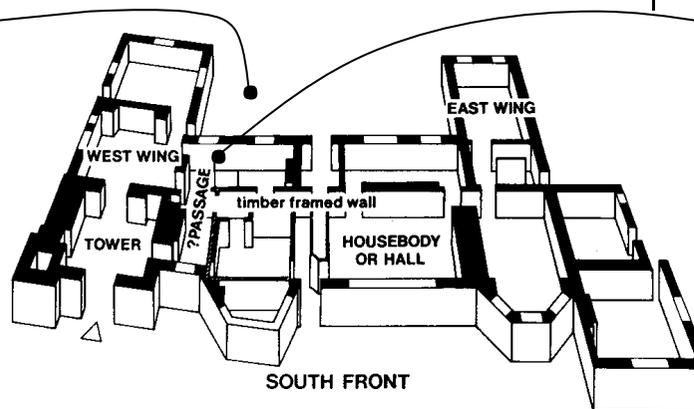


The north wall of the main range, on the left of the drawing, is obviously later than the 17th-century alterations to the wing, as it blocks part of a window. Yet the blocked window is identical in style to the main range windows, suggesting that the two phases of building activity were separated by only a short period of time. As can be seen on the plan, the main range wall fronts a series of rooms built against one side of the hall. As usual in early houses of this kind, the main range had originally been only one room wide: the north wall of the hall had been an external one. The series of rooms was added to the outside of this wall in the 17th century, but only after the two north-facing wings had been completed.

Visitors who stand in the car park, facing this side of the Hall, will see on the right a low, ruined wall containing various doorways and windows. This is all that survives of a range of outbuildings demolished sixty years ago. The doorway with pointed arch is probably medieval, but may have been moved here from some part of the Hall. During demolition this outbuilding was recorded as having elaborate timber roof trusses which had been part of a timber-framed structure; these may well have come from the late medieval timber hall which stood on the site of the present hall.

The main range itself contains fragments of this timber hall. They can be seen from the passage and staircase next to the medieval tower, and are illustrated in the drawing at the top of the right-hand column. Most of the timbering seems to be of comparatively recent date: close inspection shows that the horizontal and vertical members are not properly jointed together. But two substantial timbers are clearly from the late medieval hall. One is a 'wallplate', the piece which ran along the top of a timber-framed wall and supported the feet of the

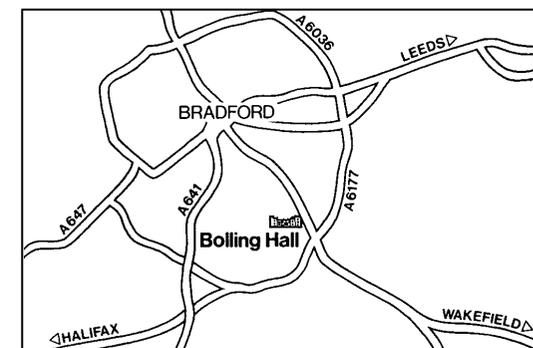
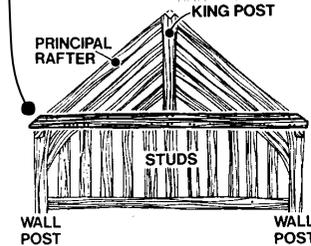
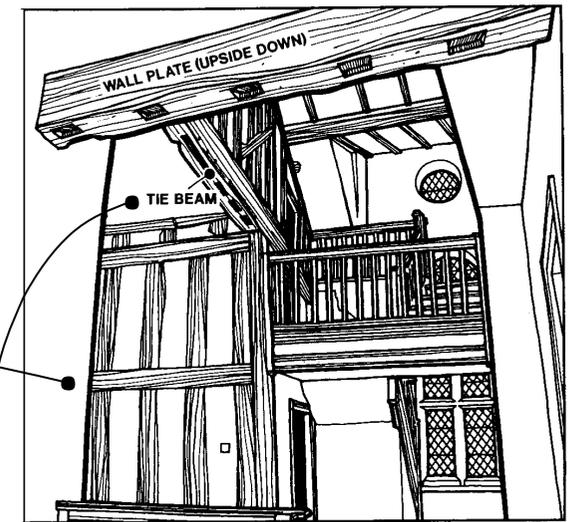
rafters. In this case it can be seen that the angled notches, where the feet of the rafters were lodged, are on the underside of the timber; whereas pegholes show that the mortice-and-tenon joints for the wall braces are on the top. The wallplate has, therefore, been repositioned upside down. The other notable timber is a 'tie-beam', a horizontal member running across the width of the building and jointed into the wallplates at each end. This beam has patterns of mortices and pegholes which indicate the positions of timbers formerly fastened into both upper and lower surfaces. The pattern of former timbers has been reconstructed in the drawing on the



right. The closely set vertical 'studs' running downwards from the tie-beam show that this was an end wall rather than an intermediate truss; above the tie was a vertical 'king post' with four diagonals (the main rafter and three braces) on each side. The roof trusses in the demolished outbuilding are also said to have had king posts.

The style of timbering which can be seen in this reconstruction drawing suggests that the hall building was similar to that at Shibden, Halifax, and to several others erected in West Yorkshire during the 15th century.

Displayed at Bolling Hall are important collections of furniture, pictures and historical material from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The museum is open daily from 10am to 5pm, October - March and from 10am to 6pm, April - September. It is closed Mondays (except Bank Holidays). Admission free. Tel: Bradford 723057.



West Yorkshire Archaeology Service
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