

Historic Houses of West Yorkshire

Cliffe Castle, Keighley



The first substantial house on this site was called Cliffe Hall. It was built by Christopher Netherwood, a lawyer in Keighley. In 1828 he purchased some cottages and land at 'lower Spring Gardens or Cliffe', and at about the same time he erected Cliffe Hall. This house is shown in the drawing (top right) which is taken from an old photograph. It was completed by 1833 to designs by George Webster of Kendal, and was later described as 'a beautiful specimen of architecture in the Elizabethan Style'. Webster was one of the architects who, in the early 19th century, revived and popularised the architectural styles current in the time of Elizabeth I and James I.

With its ornate gables and mullioned windows, Cliffe Hall gave the impression of an Elizabethan manor house.



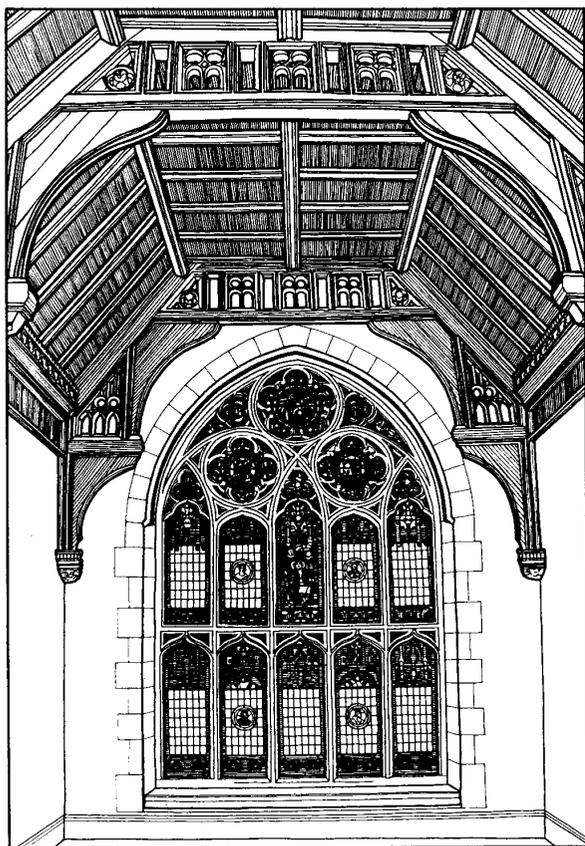
In 1848 the Butterfield family bought Cliffe Hall; they were wealthy local textile manufacturers, and had money to spend on both the house and its surroundings. They expanded the grounds from 20 to 300 acres, and in 1875 Henry Isaac Butterfield began a large-scale building programme which continued for the next nine years. The

drawing on the left (center), taken from an engraving published in 1883, shows how an Elizabethan manor house was transformed into a large, rambling 'Tudor Castle'; Henry renamed the house Cliffe Castle in 1878. A comparison of the drawing on the left with the one above it shows that the earlier Hall was incorporated in the new house, and some of its windows were enlarged. The substantial extensions included battlemented towers and a ballroom. Large conservatories were built, among them the Winter Gardens, shown on the right of the drawing.

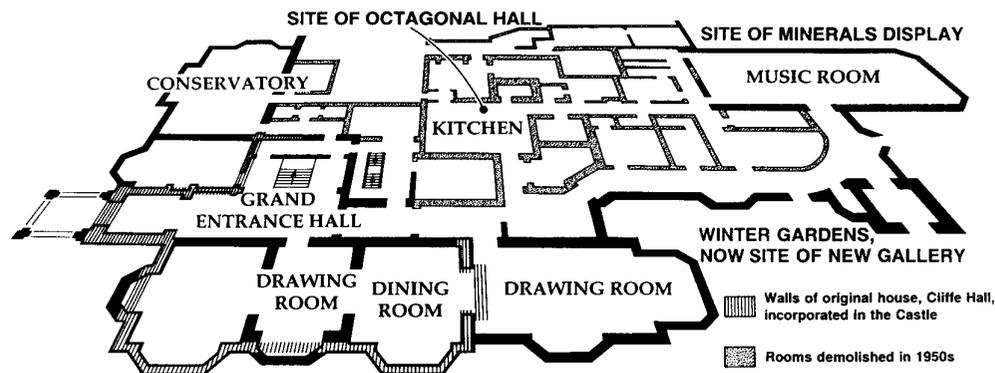
In 1949 Cliffe Castle was sold to Keighley Corporation. The purchase price was provided by Sir Bracewell Smith, a successful businessman who had grown up in the town. The grounds were opened to the public, but not the house which was in a bad state of repair. In 1955 Sir Bracewell offered further funds to pay for the conversion of the house to public use; the results of this work can be seen by comparing the drawing on the bottom left, showing the present house, with the illustration above it. The far tower was demolished and the nearer one reduced in height; the top storey of the main range was removed, and extensive repairs were carried out. What had been described as 'I probably the last of the Victorian fantasies' became a much plainer structure on the outside, though recently some of the lavish interiors of the reception rooms have been recreated.

The man who built Cliffe Castle, Henry Isaac Butterfield, and his architects drew their inspiration from the Middle Ages. This can be seen not only in the towers and battlements shown overleaf, but also in the detailed designs of individual rooms. Two rooms at opposite ends of the house still retain imposing 'Gothic' features: the music room or ballroom, which has a fine vaulted timber ceiling, and the grand entrance hall, the upper part of which is shown in the drawing above.

The drawing shows the roof structure above the staircase: it is a so-called 'hammer-beam' roof, a type which was originally used in great houses of the 15th century. A window beyond it, lighting the staircase landing, owes much to the architectural style current in the early 14th century, whereas the archways at the top and bottom of the staircase would have been found in buildings over a century earlier. Evidently Henry chose what pleased him most from a wide range of medieval architectural styles.



The use of stained glass in the staircase window is another feature inspired by the Middle Ages; the glass was designed and manufactured by a local firm, Powells of Leeds. In the top circle of the window, the portrait of the Madonna and Child is derived from a painting by Raphael, a copy of which used to hang in the Castle. The large rectangular panels of clear glass were not part of the original scheme: all ten main lights formerly contained figures in Elizabethan dress, like the one top centre. But the people represented were not historical figures: they were Victorians; members of the Butterfield family, including relatives by marriage, together with the Emperor of France, Napoleon III, and the Empress Eugenie. It appears that the use of period costume was not to the liking of Henry's son Frederick, who is depicted in the remaining panel along with his father

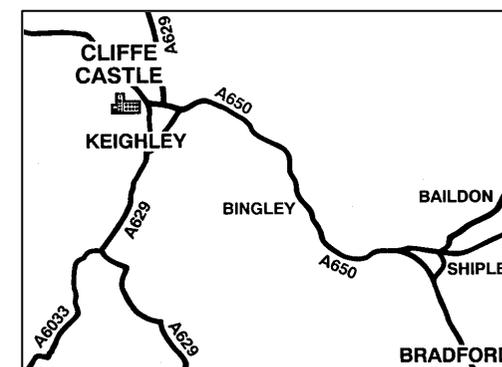


and mother. The rest were removed, and the circles of stained glass within four clear panels, depicting, among others, Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, were brought from another window.

The appearance in this window of the Emperor and Empress of France introduces the second main influence on the Castle: the tastes of the French Imperial court. The main reception rooms were decorated in French style, which Henry became acquainted with through having lived in France, and having connections with the French court and aristocracy.

The plan above shows the house as it was formerly laid out. The shaded areas of walling towards the bottom left indicate parts of the earlier Cliffe Hall which were incorporated in the Castle. The stippled walls top centre show the great extent of service rooms - kitchens, larders, servants' hall, butler's pantry and so on - which were needed to keep the household running efficiently. In the 1950s, with the conversion of the house to a museum, the service rooms were no longer needed; they were demolished and replaced by the present octagonal hall.

Henry Isaac Butterfield adopted the griffin as his heraldic crest, and visitors can find it used as a decorative motif throughout the Castle. The drawing above shows the version originally painted on the walls of the porch and grand entrance hall; it appeared along with Butterfield's monogram. The walls were later painted over, but recent investigations have uncovered extensive remains of the original designs.



CLIFFE CASTLE MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY,
SPRING GARDENS LANE, KEIGHLEY,
BD20 61-H (Tel. 01535 618230)

Open Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 5pm, Sundays 12noon - 5pm,
Closed Mondays (except Bank Holidays). Admission free.
Meals and light refreshments are available in the cafe in the park.

How to get there

In the park on the outskirts of Keighley, off the A629 Skipton road. Free car park adjacent. 10 minutes walk from bus station, 20 minutes from railway station.

West Yorkshire Archaeology Service
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