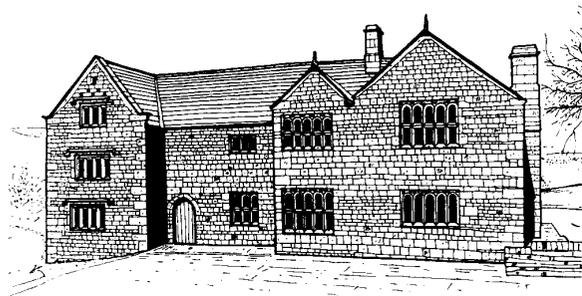


Historic Houses of West Yorkshire

The Manor House, Ilkley

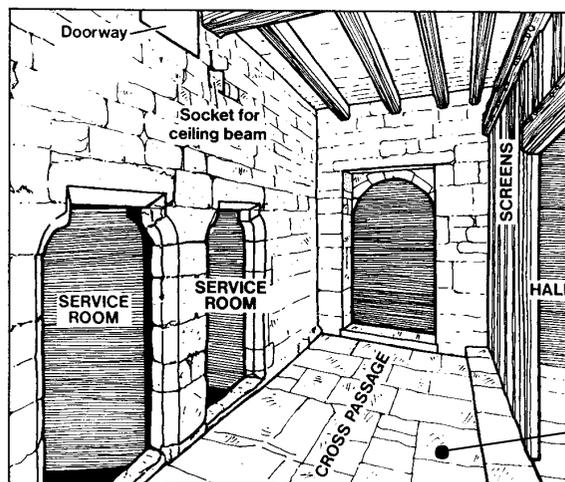


The Manor House, now the town's museum, is the oldest dwelling in Ilkley: parts of the building date back to the Middle Ages. It lies at the historic centre of the town, having been erected on the site of a Roman fort along with the ancient parish church (see drawing below). The church, founded in Anglo-Saxon times, stands near the centre of the fort, on the site of the *Principia* or headquarters building. The Manor House was built into the west side of the fort defences, which in the 4th century had been converted from a stone-faced earthen rampart to a freestanding stone wall. Other stretches of the fort wall may have been reused as a precinct boundary for the manorial enclosures. During excavations in 1920-21 the foundations of what was thought to be a medieval building were discovered at the north-west corner of the fort, along with some medieval pottery vessels. It may have been the Manor House kitchen, which would have been located in a separate building away from the hall.

The decaying buildings of the Roman fort obviously provided a ready source of stonework for both the Manor House and church. Much of the house, in particular, is built of the small squared blocks characteristic of Roman masonry. This accounts, too, for the patchwork of colours and tones on the blocks. In the church, Roman altars had been reused as windowheads; it may be that other carved stones of the Roman period are hidden within the walls of the Manor House.

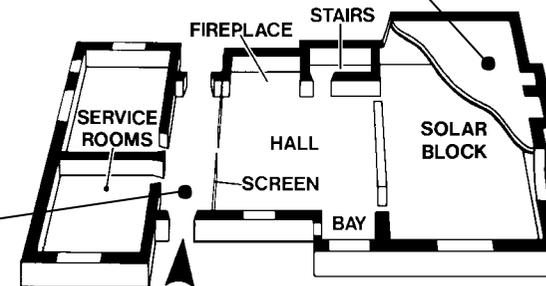
Views inside

Having entered by the main door, the visitor sees (below) the oldest surviving part of the house: the cross passage. A glance at the plan on the right shows the way in which the passage, with external doorways at both ends, divides the house into two parts. On the left (west) side are the two 'service' rooms, where food and drink were prepared for the table. The doorways to these rooms have distinctive shouldered lintels which suggest that this earliest part of the building may date back to the 14th century. Above them, the lower part of another doorway can be seen just below ceiling level. This now leads into the main first-floor room via a short flight of steps; it may be a relatively recent addition, reusing old stonework. On the right (east) of the cross passage lies the hall, the main reception and dining room. There is a fireplace in the north wall, and next to it a flight of stairs gives access to a first-floor room above the hall. It is possible, however, that there was an earlier hall on this



site which was open to the roof, built at the same time as the cross passage.

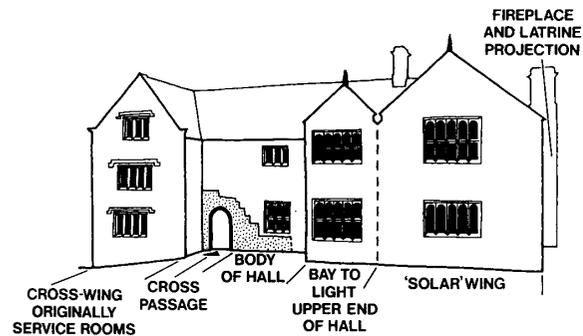
At the far end of the hall is a two-storey block roofed at right-angles. This is the 'solar block', containing the owner's private apartments. The main room is upstairs; it can be seen in the drawing above right. It was heated by a fireplace in the east wall, and next to the fireplace, built



at the same time, is a latrine closet or 'garderobe': it is simply a chute extending downwards through the thickness of the wall, with an opening on the outside at ground level. The most notable feature of the room is its roof: the main supports are king posts, tie beams, and principal rafters. These form a series of 'trusses'; careful inspection of the ends of some trusses will reveal Roman numerals cut into the surface of the timbers, to indicate,

during construction, which members should be jointed together. This roof was formerly connected to another, similar one which covers the room over the hall, but the linking timbers were cut away when the present stone partition wall was inserted. The roof was constructed in the 15th or 16th century. It may have been erected at the same time as the south wall of the building; alternatively, that wall, with its round-headed windows, may be a later rebuild, explaining why one of the trusses in the room over the hall is suspended awkwardly over the back of the bay window.

Views of the outside

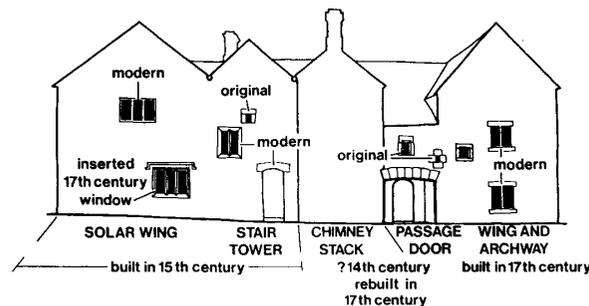


The south front of the Manor House, facing towards the town centre, is shown on the cover of this leaflet and in the outline drawing above, on which the various parts of the buildings are named. The wing on the left-hand side, with its gable facing the viewer, is in part a medieval structure: the west wall is built directly upon the foundations of the Roman fort wall. Originally, it was probably roofed at right-angles and it contained 'service' rooms where food and drink were prepared for the table. It was modernised in the 17th century, when the three flat-headed, mullioned windows were put in one above the other. On the right of this wing is the main doorway, giving access to a passage - the 'cross passage' - which runs right through the building to a second main doorway in the far wall. The passage leads on one side into the service rooms, and on the other into the hall, the main room of the building. The smallest of the three gables facing south covers a window bay which projects from the 'upper end' of the hall, providing additional light for the high table, where the owner and principal guests would sit to eat. The projecting bay is also carried

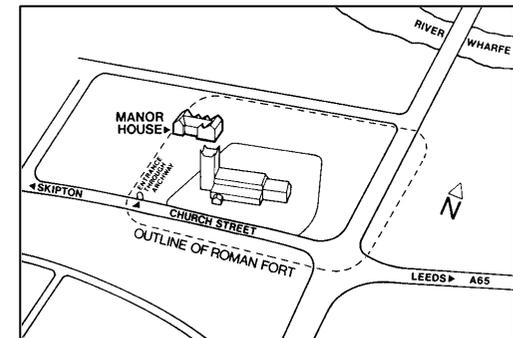
up to the first floor, to light the chamber above the hall. To the right of the hall is a second cross-wing, containing on two floors the private apartments of the owner. Both are heated by fireplaces, but the upper room, the 'solar' is the more important: it has a larger window on the south front, and contains a latrine closet, described on the other side of this leaflet.

As seen from the south side, the building looks very much as it would have done at the end of the 17th century. By that time, though, it was already several centuries old, and it had undergone various extensions and alterations. Most of the hall wall, the projecting hall bay and the gable wall of the 'solar' wing were clearly all built at one time: the neatly coursed stonework of these walls is uniform, and contains round-headed, mullion windows of the same design. The round heads and the mouldings indicate that these walls were erected in the 16th century; whereas the flat-headed mullioned windows of the wing on the left are typically 17th century. Just above and to the right of the entrance, however, the neat courses break up around what is apparently an earlier piece of walling, marked by larger weathered blocks. This walling and the doorway itself, with a pointed arch, are certainly of medieval date and possibly go back to the 14th century.

Moving round to the other (north) side of the house, the walling seems much less neat; though newly dressed masonry had been bought for the front of the house, the back had to make do with stones pillaged from the buildings of the Roman fort. The earliest part visible on this side is the doorway set back underneath the archway on the right: it is the rear entrance to the medieval cross passage. The archway itself was built at the same time as



the projecting wing on the right. This belongs to the 17th century, and it replaced the medieval service rooms which probably had a north wall in line with the passage doorway. Immediately left of the archway is the gable wall of the projecting chimney stack; this served the great fireplace in the hall. To the left of the chimney, the stairs and solar block were clearly built at one time, since the stone courses run through both areas of walling. They are associated with the magnificent 15th or 16th-century roofing (see overleaf). All but the smallest windows on this side of the building are insertions into earlier walls, and most of them are fairly recent additions. The door to the stair tower is a modern fire door, but an 18th-century painting (a photograph of it is in the house) shows an external flight of steps leading to a doorway where the large staircase window has since been inserted.



Ilkley lies on the A65 between Leeds and Skipton.

The museum has displays on the archaeology of the area, including the Roman Fort and the later history of Ilkley, particularly as a spa resort; it also has a programme of temporary exhibitions. Open daily (except Mondays) from 10am. Admission free.

West Yorkshire Archaeology Service
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