



THE HISTORY OF OULTON HALL HOTEL

*Oulton Hall ca: 1910
Picture Courtesy of David Cole*



Oulton Hall now stands as a luxury hotel on the outskirts of Leeds - a complex offering spa & leisure facilities, 2 golf courses and luxury wedding venue.

The house and surrounding estate has a wealth of history - you may have already noticed the portraits and other references throughout the hotel, giving a glimpse of the memories within the walls...

The fascinating journey of the hall starts as a simple farmhouse but over the years the Hall has had many a purpose including that of a mansion residence, a hospital during the Great War and through to the 1970's before being left to ruin and rebuilt as a hotel.

2018 marked the 25th year of the hotel's opening and to honour this landmark we wanted to share with you, our guest - Oulton Hall's story so far.



Repton's drawing of the house from the Red Book of Oulton

'The Red Book of Oulton' by Humphry Repton, depicting the farmhouse at the site of Oulton Hall

The original residence at the site of Oulton Hall was that of a simple farmhouse, built by Francis Blayds in the mid 1700's before being inherited by his son John.

John Blayds held the office of Lord Mayor of Leeds in 1761, 1774 and in 1776, became one of the six partners in Beckett's Bank along with John Calverley. The Blayds and Calverley families already had links via marriage and previous financial affairs but their relationship strengthened from this point.

Blayds died in 1804 without any sons, and the estate passed to sister, Mary, who specified in her will that upon her death, her other sibling Anne would be the main beneficiary until such time as her passing when the estate would then be inherited by John and his heirs thereafter.

OULTON

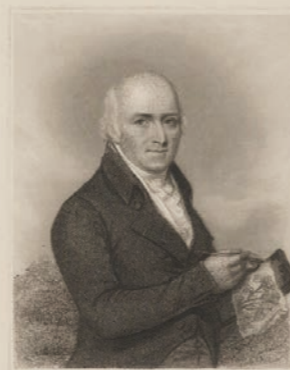
A few years after taking ownership of the house, Blayds (formerly Calverley) obtained permission by Royal Assent in 1809 to enclose Oulton Park (the land surrounding the house), and raise the banks to conceal the house from the main road. He appointed Humphry Repton to design and landscape the new gardens.

Repton, known as the successor to 'Capability' Brown and responsible for the creation of over 200 gardens and parklands, presented his proposals in the form of 'Red Books' depicting watercolour illustrations. The Red Book of Oulton survives today and provides an insight to the former residence at Oulton Hall and the ideas behind the landscape still seen today.

The estate was redesigned incorporating a new entrance, lake and lodge house. He painted his visions of the improved areas and then added the original landscape as an overlay - a new concept allowing a 'live' comparison of the two views.

Repton also proposed alterations to the house but these were declined. Instead, Blayds decided to alter and enlarge the house to the designs of Robert Smirke in around 1822.

Humphry-
Repton



HUMPHRY REPTON, 1801

Landscape
before - the
Red Book
of Oulton



*This foreground
does not exist
at present*

Depicting the
proposed new
landscape -
Red Book
of Oulton

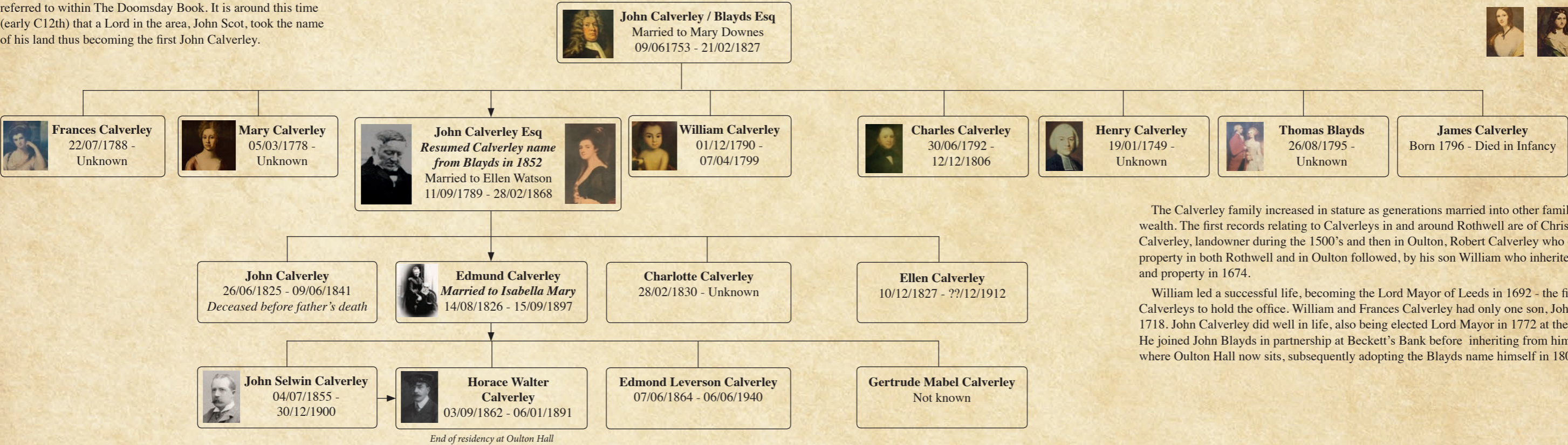


THE CALVERLEYS – HISTORY BEFORE THE HALL

The Calverley name originates with the village of Calverley, situated between Leeds and Bradford - a village which is referred to within The Domesday Book. It is around this time (early C12th) that a Lord in the area, John Scot, took the name of his land thus becoming the first John Calverley.

THE CALVERLEYS OF OULTON

Who do these ladies go with?



The Calverley family increased in stature as generations married into other families of wealth. The first records relating to Calverleys in and around Rothwell are of Christopher Calverley, landowner during the 1500's and then in Oulton, Robert Calverley who owned property in both Rothwell and in Oulton followed, by his son William who inherited the land and property in 1674.

William led a successful life, becoming the Lord Mayor of Leeds in 1692 - the first of many Calverleys to hold the office. William and Frances Calverley had only one son, John, born in 1718. John Calverley did well in life, also being elected Lord Mayor in 1772 at the age of 54. He joined John Blayds in partnership at Beckett's Bank before inheriting from him, the land where Oulton Hall now sits, subsequently adopting the Blayds name himself in 1807.

All family photos courtesy of Tim Bradley-Williams
(Descendant of John Selwin Calverley)

ST JOHN'S CHURCH

Upon his death in 1827 Blayd's estate was passed to his son (also called John) who later reverted back to the original family name of Calverley

John was an attached member of The Church of England and he carried out his father's intentions of building St John's Church, located at the end of Oulton Hall's current drive. Blayds is commemorated in the founder's memorial within the church the first stone being laid by his son on December 7th 1827.

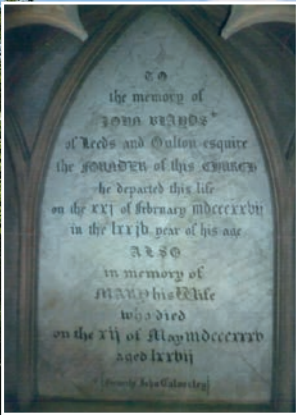


Illustration of the lodge from the Red Book of Oulton



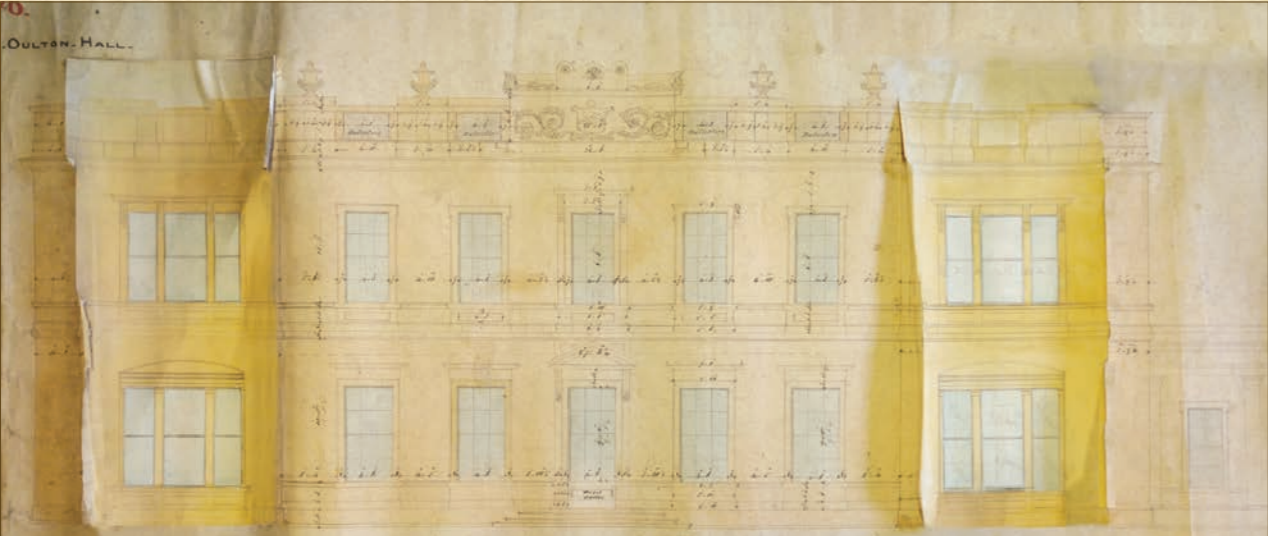
John continued the alterations to the house until a fire broke out in in the summer of 1850 whilst the family were away on vacation. It reported that the fire started when plumbers were melting lead to carry out repairs to the roof of an extended area of the house, resulting in damage to the value of £1,500.

A great deal of furniture and pictures were saved from the house and moved into the grounds where local police guarded the property from the many locals who had gathered.

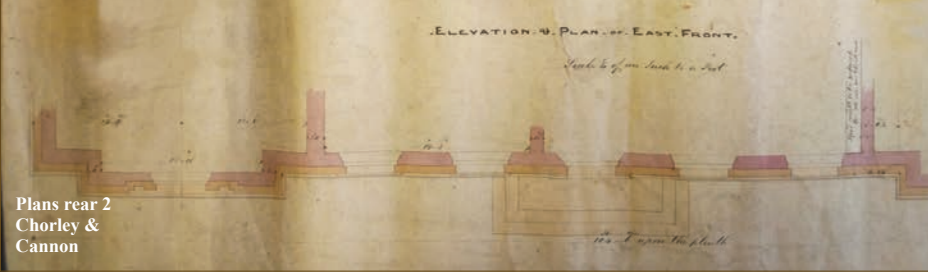


The lodgehouse was demolished in 1851 to make way for the new Oulton by pass road, the original (now blocked) entrance can still be seen from the Grove roundabout (near Toby Carvery).

THE HOUSE BECOMES THE HALL

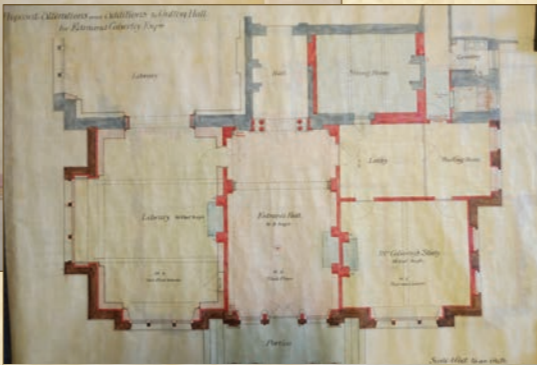


John Calverley (formerly Blayds) died in 1868, leaving the estate to son Edmund and the house was further developed with an additional wing by 1891 via the appointment of architects Chorley & Cannon



A few years after the fire, Leeds architects William Perkin & Elisa Backhouse were employed to design a new, grand Oulton Hall which was completed in 1855.

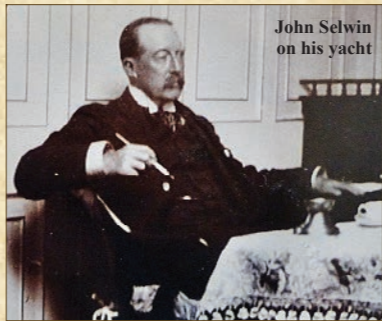
In the coming years, the house was extended with the addition of a large service wing for the benefit of John's son Edmund along with the creation of the new drive facing south west and additions to the grounds at the design of William Nesfield.



Ground floor proposed plans



John served in the 4th Battalion Essex Regiment - also rising through the ranks to become 'Captain'. He was well known in yachting circles, winning numerous prizes on his yacht 'brunhilde' until his passing in 1900 aged just 45.



Edmund joined the Yeomanry as a young man, serving 13 years before retiring as a captain. He was closely involved with St John's church and the activities of Oulton Village throughout his life becoming more reserved as his health deteriorated in later years.

It is from this point forward that the family no longer resided at Oulton Hall

THE HOUSE BECOMES THE HALL



Edmund Calverley's children on the steps of Oulton Hall: Horace Walter, Gertrude Mabel, Edmond Leveson and John Selwin

MILITARY HOSPITAL/COMMUNITY CARE



1882 Horace and John – Dragoon Guards

The estate then came under the ownership of his John's brother - Horace Walter Calverley, (later a Major of the 5th Dragoon Guards).

Horace, owning other properties, rarely spent any time at Oulton Hall choosing Down Hall in Essex as his main residence.

Isabella (widow of Edmund) then moved from the Hall, leaving it in charge of a caretaker.



During the Great War, Horace made it available as a convalescent home for Belgian refugees and wounded officers. By 1918, 70 beds were available within the hall, providing care to officers suffering mainly from shell shock. The Hall provided spacious rooms and opportunities for recreation including a grand piano in the entrance for the musically astute and a well-stocked library.

OFFICERS' HOSPITAL, OULTON HALL.

Sir,—For some months past the Northern Command has been endeavouring to find a large country house suitable for a hospital for officers suffering from neurasthenia and shell shock, which would be entirely devoted to the treatment of such cases.

An ideal building has now been provided, through the generosity of Major H. Calverley, who has placed Oulton Hall at the disposal of the military authorities, rent free. Certain necessary alterations and repairs have been effected by the Government, at a cost of over £2,000, with the result that a splendid hospital is about to be opened, capable of accommodating 70 patients.

Captain Fazan, late of the Abram Peel Hospital, Bradford, has been appointed Commandant and Medical Officer-in-charge, and Miss Gwendolen Money, late of Field House Hospital, Bradford, has been selected for the post of matron.

Furniture and equipment have also been provided by the Government, but there are certain articles not appearing on their schedule which are very urgently needed. These include an ambulance for conveying patients and their baggage to and from Woodlesford Station, a piano, and a full-size billiard table. A modern car of about 20 h.p., not in use owing to the shortage of petrol, would be gratefully accepted. If the body were not found suitable, a new one would be provided out of Red Cross funds. It is not necessary to give details respecting the piano and billiard table; all knowledge concerning both has long since been in the possession of the West Riding; and its inhabitants have never yet been appealed to, during the war, for anything required at a military hospital, without the best results. It is believed that the provision of recreation for neurasthenic officers will readily commend itself to their generous sympathy.

All correspondence relating to the hospital or answers to this appeal should be addressed to the County Director, Colonel G. W. E. Duncombe, C.B.E., Territorial Headquarters, York.—Yours, etc.,

C. W. E. DUNCOMBE,
Territorial Headquarters, 9, St. Leonard's, York.

Horace and the remaining Calverley family emigrated to Canada in 1925 due to ill health. As numbers dwindled, The Ministry of Pensions removed the soldier patients elsewhere and the hospital subsequently closed. Horace, now living abroad, decided to sell the hall to the West Riding Council but retain some of the land.

A few years later, the hall was re-opened as a hospital to provide care for the 'mentally defective' containing in excess of 200 beds for male patients of all ages and with a range of conditions.



MILITARY HOSPITAL/COMMUNITY CARE



All photos courtesy of Howard Benson



Period costume ball marked the closure of the hospital in 1972.

During the 1960's attitudes to mental health changed and slowly the patients of Oulton Hall were placed into more residential care. The remaining patients were transferred to Fieldhead Hospital in Wakefield which still has a dedicated unit to this day.

PLANS FOR POLICE HQ & INTO RUIN



14 OULTON HALL HOTEL

By 1974 Oulton Hall became a grade 11 listed building and the property of the West Yorkshire City Council with the intention of developing it into Police HQ.

Although part of the grounds were used for Police training exercises, the development into a HQ did not materialise due a combination of factors including funding and restrictions on the land.



In 1986, Leeds City Council bought the Hall and 95 acres of grounds.

Parts of the Oulton Estate were then developed into an 18 hole golf course at a cost of £1m, complete with a clubhouse – converted from the existing stable block. However the main building lay empty, becoming merely a shell.

PLANS FOR POLICE HQ & INTO RUIN



Courtesy of John Thorpe & The Oulton Society

BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

De Vere Hotels purchased the building in 1991 and £20m was spent on restoring and repairing the hall back to its former glory.

Designer Anne Jordan worked with English Heritage (who listed the grounds and building as Grade II) and spent many hours viewing photographs from national records to research the history of the hall. Temple Newsam staff had rescued fragments of the building's interior during its deterioration and this allowed Anne's designs to incorporate some of the previous décor. She also sourced negatives of the original family portraits so that the pictures could once again be part of the hall.



The luxury 'Oulton Hall Hotel' opened with a Victorian style celebration event on 7th June 1993 and it was later awarded 5 star status – the only hotel to achieve this in the North of England, along with a red rosette for the then named 'Bronte Restaurant'.

Some of the staff who work at the hotel today were part of the first team in 1993, including our Head Butler Peter McMahon, Executive Head Chef Stephen Collinson and Pastry Chef Jayne Percival.

QHOTELS

QHotels purchased the Hotel in November 2014 and invested over £3m into refurbishment over the coming years. This transformed the interior of the main house and brought the décor and facilities up to date, whilst maintaining the hotel's luxury status and traditional touches.



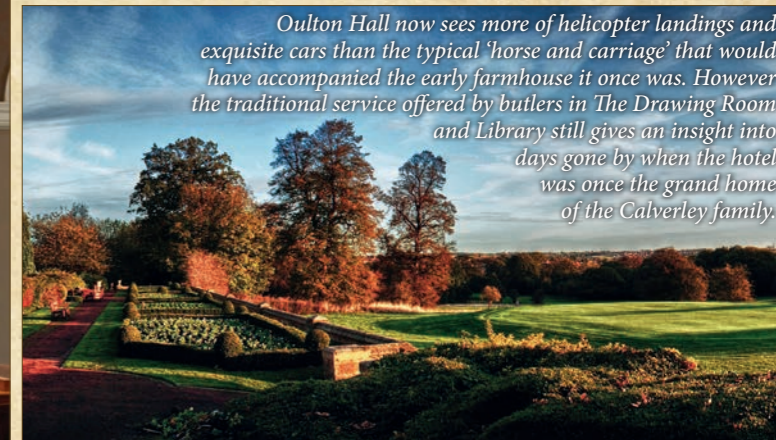
In 2018 the QHotels brand was bought by RBH Management (the current owners of Oulton Hall) and it has continued to be a successful and iconic hotel, acquiring many awards and accolades in recent years.

Changes to the Hall will continue over time with further refurbishment and modernisation, yet the history within the walls of this fantastic property will remain honoured and respected.

OULTON HALL THROUGH THE YEARS



OULTON HALL THROUGH THE YEARS



Oulton Hall now sees more of helicopter landings and exquisite cars than the typical 'horse and carriage' that would have accompanied the early farmhouse it once was. However the traditional service offered by butlers in The Drawing Room and Library still gives an insight into days gone by when the hotel was once the grand home of the Calverley family.



OULTON HALL

Yorkshire

With thanks to:-

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Tim Bradley-Williams
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West Yorkshire Archives Service

The Oulton Society Archives

