

LANGAR HALL

HISTORY



Langar Hall is a Sanskrit word for a place where pilgrims receive rest and nourishment. Every Sikh temple has a Langar Hall where worshipers enjoy a free meal before going to the temple.

The priory of St Ethelburger, close by Langar, is mentioned in the Vatican archives as a place 'where great multitudes resort' to receive blessing and remission from their sins in the next life when they visit on any of the many holy feast days.

At that time Langar Hall, a medieval castle, was situated half a mile north of the church beside the river Smite. The priory, half a mile to the south of the church by a stream. I imagine the weary pilgrims trudging up the hill to church and then on to the priory for their blessings.

Sadly all traces of the castle and the priory that used to be evident under the grass disappeared when the pastureland was ploughed in the 1970s. I think the present network of moats were once carp ponds for the priory and village before they were transformed into an ornamental network of moats in the C18th.

The Medieval Langar Hall by the river Smite was the home of the Tiptoft family, at that time one of the wealthiest landowners in England. This "Castle" passed by marriage to the Scroope family, Lords of the North, Kingmakers, traitors, Chancellors and Archbishops.

In Shakespeare's Henry V, Lord Henry Scroop is involved in the Southampton Plot against the king.

There might have been some misunderstanding here! Lord Scroope is last seen being escorted off for execution before the battle of Agincourt and his head was paraded through England from south to his estates in the north. .



The household and village were wiped out by the plague, 1665. The old house abandoned and the new house built on its present position on the top of the hill and joined to the church so that the family could attend Mass daily without the risk of catching 'their death of cold' on the way to church.

The historian Leland records At Langar close by the church is a stone house of the Lords Scoopes embattled like a castle

The Scroope family occupied Langar Hall for some 200 years; Langar was their pleasant family house situated conveniently between London and their main estate at Bolton Castle in Yorkshire.

This area of England was a centre of trouble during the Civil War. When King Charles 1st spent his last night of freedom at Southwell. His brother Rupert stayed that night at Wiverton Hall, a mile away and at that time connected to Langar Hall by underground a secret passage. Consequently the Roundheads raised that house to the ground. Records give an account of Lord Scoope's men from Langar, on parade one misty morning 1640, ambushed by Roundheads from Colston Bassett and all slain. We may have disturbed their grave when laying new drains 1991; skulls of young men with good teeth of about that period were found together. We buried them in a communal coffin with honor and ceremony and their souls do not disturb us.

Emmanuel, the last Lord Scoope of Langar (the family still live in Yorkshire) was a gambler and bon viveur. He evaded paying the ruinous taxes levied by Cromwell (wish I could do the same) and lived to have his debts cancelled on the return of the Monarchy. Thanks to Emmanuel Scoop who lay low during this troubled period, playing no part in politics, Langar remained untouched.



Emmanuel married Elizabeth, daughter of the Duke of Rutland thus extending his land to join up to the Belvoir estate. Elizabeth was childless but Emmanuel sired five illegitimate daughters by his housekeeper Martha Jeans. To the eldest, Arabella he left the Langar estate of 10,000 acres. Arabella married John Howe, a young politician from Gloucestershire and a favorite at the court of Charles II. He persuaded the King to legitimize his wife by Act of Parliament. Thus Arabella assumed all the rights and titles befitting a lady of her station.

The history of the Howe family is one of the most illustrious of 18th Century England. We shall skip that now as it needs serious research. But I just have to tell you that one son of this marriage was killed at Ticonderoga and another, a young Lieutenant in the American Wars of independence, led his troupe of soldiers up the Heights of Abraham enabling Wolf to capture Quebec. Had it not been for that young man from Langar perhaps French would be America's mother tongue.

In reception there is a poster of Gainsborough's portrait of Lady Howe, wife of the most famous Admiral Lord Howe. At the end of a long career in the navy he achieved his greatest victory known as 'The Glorious First of June' 1794. He changed the 'broadside' way the navy fought their battles by commanding his ships to go through the enemy line. Nelson followed his example and Britain ruled the waves from that time onwards. Prints commemorating the battle are hung here in the hall.

We celebrate The Glorious First of June every year with a short remembrance in the church, scattering his tomb with laurel leaves and champagne before sitting down to lunch and drinking more toasts. The monument that was intended to go on top of his tomb instead went to join other British heroes in Westminster Abbey



Lady Howe, mother of the Admiral, modernized the earlier house, extending it and adding an elegant pillared façade looking west over acres of parkland stocked with deer. Fragments the park surround the present much smaller house of 1835.

After the death of the Admiral Lord Howe in 1798 the house lay empty for 20 years. His surviving daughter married Mr Penn Curzon and moved to Penn House near Amersham.

The estate was divided and the property eventually sold to Mr Marriott a prosperous local farmer with a large family. When a smoldering beam proved impossible to extinguish the great house was demolished. Mr Marriott built the present, very modest house employing the same local architect/builder he used to build similar houses in the near by villages.

Only the kitchen remains; the heart of the house today as it was all those years ago. There the stonewalls, arched for old ranges form a backdrop to the present stainless steel operation. On the lawn in front of the house two stone balls, from the top of an ancient gateway, rest on the base of two of the six Ionic columns from the 18th century portico. This gives an indication of the vast proportions of Langar Hall at the height of its magnificence. The situation close by the church, overlooking ancient trees down the hill to the moats leave an impression of the scene enjoyed by all those who lived here centuries ago.

In 1860 my Great Grandmother, Annie Bayley, bought Langar Hall. She was the daughter of the composer Henry farmer who wrote the Harrow school song and came from a music hall family in Nottingham. She married Thomas Bayley, a wealthy coal owner and liberal MP for Chesterfield. He built her a 'little palace' in The Park, Nottingham where perhaps she found social life a little dull. She left her husband to his career and their teenage to their youthful follies and moved out to Langar.



She would travel by train from Nottingham to Barnstone station a mile away and from there by horse and carriage to Langar Hall. Her family frequently bicycled from Nottingham to visit her and finally her husband retired to spend the last days of his life together. They are buried in the family corner of churchyard under the shade of a sycamore tree.

In her will Annie Bayley left Langar Hall and the estate divided between her four children. Her daughter Muriel, my paternal Grandmother, was the only one who wanted to live here but as she did not inherit the wealth of the coal mines she sold the estate farms and to buy out her siblings. Once again Langar passed through the female line.

After the First World War The Treaty of Versailles ruled that Germany must supply free coal and steel for the rest of Europe. Thus the great wealth of the coalmines diminished. There was no sale for coal and the industry with the family fortunes only revived when the Labour Government nationalized coal after the Second World War.

Muriel married Percy Huskinson one of 10 sons from Epperstone Manor, co incidentally also once part of the Howe estate. Percy ran the first buses in Nottingham but his company did not survive the rule that obliged every bus to be escorted by a man on foot waving a red flag. He had the first garage and show room In Nottingham selling Daimler cars but, with growing competition from new agencies, this business also failed and he returned to lead a modest life with Muriel at Langar.

Here he founded the Scout organisation for Nottinghamshire while Muriel started the local WI. They had two sons, my Father Geoffrey and his younger brother Leonard Huskinson, artist and illustrator.



My Father inherited Langar Hall on the death of his Mother in 1933. He was a most kind and charming gentleman who, in the 1920s played rugby for England, cricket for Notts and once tennis at Wimbledon. He planted trees, restored the waterfall and fountain and laid out terrace gardens below the house where shady paths entwined the network of medieval fishponds.

Geoffrey married Carmen de las Casas, a descendent of Napoleon's secretary on Helena. Her Father was a Spanish nobleman from Cuba, which may account for my addictions for sugar and tobacco and my reputation as a slave driver.

I visited Cuba 10 years ago and was astounded to find a statue of Friar de las Casas in Trinidad. He came to Cuba with Columbus and took up the cause of the indigenous Indians. But that is another story.

Shortly after her marriage my Mother's family house, Batts Park near Taunton was demolished. Salvaged from there the the Adams pillars were brought to Langar where they transform the dining room lending it an illusion of space and elegance. My parents had four children of which I am the only daughter. My elder brother Mark is a sporting artist and cartoonist; his pictures hang in the bar and are on sale in reception. He lives at Dembleby near Grantham. Younger brothers Peter, a writer and keen sailor, lives in France and Tony, a keen cricketer and journalist died a few years ago.

My Mother loved Ireland where she had a charming house by Lough Derg in Tipparary. In 1968 she persuaded my Father to retire there. Although he was never a rich man, like many of his generation he was determined to avoid paying death duties. With the family lawyers he devised a plan to divide his estate between his four children seven years before he died. Like Shakespeare's King Lear this generous plan ended badly for everyone apart from myself.



I felt I had to accept the house so that my brothers, who did not want what they described as 'a stone around the neck,' could have their inheritance: the farm, land, stocks and shares and the Irish property. At that time I was the only one in the position to take on the responsibilities of Langar Hall. I inherited my Father's optimistic character and together we planned the 'take over' blinded by our enthusiasm to the realities of our financial situation. Thus the long pattern of the property passing through the female line which appealed to my father's sense of continuity, our shared love of history and my love of the place.

In 1968 Langar Hall with 30 acres of land, the lodge and church cottages (sold 1971) was valued at £11,000.

The gardens were lovely then, falling in terraces of shrubs and rose walks down through pleached alleys of apple trees to the kitchen garden at the end of the North slope. The house looked down on 'Little Chatsworth' where a waterfall, fountain and statues marked the start of the network of moats. Manicured lawns flanked by herbaceous borders surrounded the house, beds of wallflowers in May followed the daffodils and tulips, mounds of vegetables and soft fruit lovingly grown by Bill Crowe the gardener, were all taken for granted. I had no idea of the work or the cost that this took to maintain and I regret that when the old gardener died the old garden died with him.

With my trust fund of £15,000 I divided the rambling house of my childhood into two. The kitchen and back part of the house was converted into a Pied a Terre for my parents and brothers to stay when they came back from Ireland. Then, like my Great Grandmother and Grandmother before me, I moved from The Park in Nottingham with my husband and young daughter, to live at Langar Hall.

I did not expect to afford to live here for long and was anxious to preserve it's charm and to pass it on with little change.



My husband carried out his art dealing business from the house. I cleaned and restored oil paintings in the drawing room and joined every council and committee that got me out of the house and paid for petrol and parking.

We struggled through the recessions of the 1970s and I would have gladly sold up had it not been for my husband's dislike of change and for my Father who suffered a severe stroke. He loved Langar, regretted moving to Ireland and stayed here often until his death in 1983.

Shortly before the death of my Father I had a dream so clear that I acted upon it at once. I dreamed that the geography of the house was quite changed; there were bathrooms and bedroom in place of passages and flats. Crowds of elegant people of all nationalities were gathered in the hall waiting for dinner and lines of expensive cars were parked under the trees in the garden. I knew these strangers were expecting to meet Lord Byron, D.H. Lawrence and Samuel Butler (author of *The Way of All Flesh*. Born Langar 1835) and I was anxious whether these long gone local characters would turn up to entertain the guests.

The following morning I happened to read an article in the newspaper entitled "How to live in the way to which you would like to become accustomed" This gave details of some organizations that arranged for tourists to stay in English homes as an alternative to staying in hotels or Bed & breakfast. I telephoned them all, they were not encouraging, pointing out that Langar was not on any tourist trail but they agreed to inspect and eventually Langar Hall was included in *The Woolsey Lodge* brochure 1983 along with 12 other homes mainly in the South East of England. My plan was to make £1,000 to finance the painting of the house in preparation for its sale.



On the morning of my Father's funeral the plumbers came down the stairs with their tools having just finished fitting the first 'en-suite' bathroom and met the family arriving for the funeral. Three months later I welcomed my first paying guest.

The idea of turning Langar into a hotel was not at all what I had in mind at that time. I was completely ignorant of the hotel and restaurant business having hardly ever stayed in a hotel and the only restaurants I knew were ones I had been taken to in Paris. Indeed had I known what was involved I would not have opened the door. Those first two letting bedrooms and a few American visitors were the start of the present flourishing hotel & restaurant business which has given me the good life I least expected.

When people ask me how I feel about having 'strangers' in my home the answer is simply that I love it. I have never wanted to go back to 'private life'. After 25 years I can hardly remember an unpleasant guest and many have become friends. With their encouragement the house retains the impression of a home although it is fully staffed and managed as a business run for the enjoyment of the guests and myself.



There is good wine in the cellar now, celebrations music and laughter in the dining room, the house was never so comfortable or the rooms as petty. The moat is stocked with carp (at present being dredged and restored) and more trees have been planted. Next year you will be able to walk around the moat again, over bridges and through mown paths and picnic under the trees.

When I took over in 1968 I wanted this magical place to survive into the 21st century. Now this island of tranquility has become almost unique in this part of England. I have the loyalty and encouragement of my customers and staff to thank for helping me to achieve the dream.

