

The Museum Collection

No. 7

An Abridged History



Grove House

by

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Grove House - an Abridged History

By W.A.C. Hartmann, Grand Secretary, R.A.O.B., G.L.E.



The building currently known as Grove House, situated on Skipton Road Harrogate, dates from three identifiable periods, the earliest of which is 1752/4 and can be seen in the “square block” at the centre of the building as viewed from the outside. From the inside, at ground floor level, the four stone arches mark its boundary. The West wing with its grand staircase and window, was the first extension, was completed in 1868 together with stables and the East wing with tower dates from 1899.

The premises were originally built at the time when Harrogate was developing as a spa town because of the health giving properties of the water found in a large number of springs and wells. Grove House was built as a small hostelry or Guest House and was

originally called “The World’s End.” There is some evidence to show that for a while it served as a staging post for passengers and mail from London to York.

With most of the more important waters being available on the other side of Harrogate, those who came to take the cure were reluctant to walk or travel so far to the wells. Thus the hotels, hostleries and guesthouses on that side of town prospered, while those on this side struggled to survive. Many closed to become private residences or were used for other purposes. The license for the “World’s End” was transferred to new premises on the river at Knaresborough to fall in line with one of the many predictions of Old Mother Shipton, who five centuries ago is reputed to have said, “The world shall end when the High Bridge is thrice fallen.” It is the Road Bridge over the river Nidd as you drive into Knaresborough. The bridge, incidentally, has fallen twice, so far, so please exercise caution when crossing

Around 1805 the premises were acquired and used as a

boarding school by a Mrs. Holland. Barbara Hoole, a well-known Yorkshire authoress of the period, later purchased it. She used it as a Ladies Finishing School, which was perhaps the forerunner to what is now the Harrogate College.

In 1822 (the year the Order is reputed to have been founded) the Reverend T.T. Wildsmith obtained ownership and used the premises as a school for boys. Much later it was unoccupied for a number of years and was alleged to have been haunted, although this was proven to be a trick of light, when Captain Heneby purchased the building. In 1850 Mr. Samson Fox, a Civil Engineer from Leeds bought the property and is responsible for much of the splendid building we have today. It was he who changed the name to Grove House after a splendid grove of trees in what is now Grove Road.

Mr. Fox, who is a direct ancestor of Edward Fox, the actor, and his brothers, was a great Victorian industrialist and benefactor to the nation as well as the local community. In 1870 he donated sufficient monies to build the Royal College of Music in London. He provided Harrogate with its first public Fire Service, first public street lighting and is

associated with the establishment Grove Road Boarding School, almost opposite our front gates. The original horse drawn steam fire engine "Old Samson" from the Harrogate station is on public display at Harewood House in their Bird Gardens, which are open to the public, throughout the year, along with part of the House. As a town Councillor, he championed the cause of the working man and provided cheap housing in the community, since there was very little provision given when the explosion in the work force occurred to man the Hotels and associated services. He built a housing estate in Starbeck, which was completed in 1902. These houses were sold at a cost of £100 each, or could be rented for two shillings and five pence (2/5 or 12 decimal pence of to-days money). Eventually he was to become Mayor of Harrogate for three successive years (1887-1892), a feat never equalled since.

Although a public benefactor Samson Fox is more noted in Harrogate for three Ox roasting events he provided on the Stray. One was in 1887 to celebrate the jubilee of Queen Victoria and one in 1902 to celebrate the end of the boar war. Close to the earlier roasting there is commemorative oak tree.

The Ox roasting was revived by the present Grand Secretary in 1979 for the Garden Party that year, the Grand Primo, Brother George Husband used a special set of carvers made by Samson Fox for the Ox Roast in 1887, to commemorate the silver jubilee of Queen Victoria. These carvers have a blade almost four feet in length and may be seen at Grove House by special arrangement with the Grand Secretary. The following year a Boar was roasted. The garden party which has now become an annual event was the first of three organised by the R.A.O.B. G.L.E. Grove House employees and was the first to raise in excess of a thousand pounds.

In 1993 the Grand Primo planted a second oak tree close to that planted by Fox to commemorate the jubilee of our present Queen. Both trees can be seen on Skipton Road opposite the Jimmah Indian Restaurant, the Fox tree is encased in metal railings.

Samson Fox built the extensions to Grove House, being the present East and West wings, together with what are now referred to as the Royal Stables with its ornate clock tower. This can be seen from smaller rose garden at the side of the house. By

purchasing small or tiny portions of land in the immediate locality, the estate eventually grew to some seventy-five acres. For example the land that accommodated the original gatehouse at the entrance to the estate, where the present bungalow is situated cost a mere £160. It is amusing to note that the patch of grass outside the gates was once intended to allow the farmers to graze their sheep overnight on the way to Knaresborough market. The grounds accommodated a private gas works, science laboratory and observatory.

Most of the stained glass and oak panelling on the ground floor came from the old Dragon Hotel on the opposite side of Skipton Road, and just over the bridge.



Nine Panels on the Grand Hall Staircase

The clock tower for the stables, together with most of the stone

used in building the east wing, the tower and the stables also came from the Dragon Hotel.

If you closely examine the glass screen at the east wing entrance near the present dining room, you will find a dragon motif encompassed in the design of the glasswork.

The house is reputed to be the first in Yorkshire to be equipped with gas lighting and central heating, generated from a gas plant situated within the grounds. The stables are thought to have been the first in the country to provide Turkish Baths for horses, at a time when they were not too well known for humans. (Can this really have been the 1870's?).

The west wing which currently provides bedrooms 3, 4, 5 and 6, the first floor TV lounge, Grand Secretary's office and Lodge room was originally built to provide a suite of rooms for the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and his entourage when visiting Yorkshire dates from 1880 and included a library, billiard room and small gallery. The stained glass on the grand staircase was intended to be a crafty way of demonstrating to His Royal Highness exactly where Fox had made his money and his support for industry.



The Grand Hall — West Wing

The east wing, on the site of the former Grove House Winter Garden was built to provide a music room and ball room (at present bedrooms 1, 2, the annexe and library) on the ground floor and an art gallery on the first floor (now bedrooms 7 to 16) and dates from 1898/02

A Special souvenir Christmas card of 1902 from Mr. Samson Fox, CE. JP measuring almost four feet across depicting the picture gallery is held in the custody of the Grand Secretary, as is a photograph album showing Grove House as a residence before the east wing was built. A refuse collector who was a member of the Order found the album in a dustbin. Both may be seen by anybody requesting to do so. They are not on permanent display, simply to retain and maintain their present state of preservation.

Fox died in 1903 at Walsall and so for a number of years the house lay unoccupied, although staff were retained to administer the estate and to keep the house clean. During the Great War or First World War (1914-1918) Grove House, along with a number of other houses in the area, was used as a Hospital for troops from the Somme and Flanders. This later service was again provided by the Home during the Second World War (1939-1945), although on this occasion our orphan children and Offices remained in occupation.



*Ground Floor Television Lounge, formerly the
Breakfast room*

The Order purchased the premises in 1926 for £10,000 to use as an orphanage, because of the prolonged arguments at Grand Lodge over the question of legal ownership of the R.A.O.B. Orphanage at Aldridge (near Walsall). These later premises being paid for, but not owned by the Order. It took the Order nearly six years to raise the funds to

complete the purchase together with a further £12,000 that was spent in adapting the premises specifically for our requirements. To raise the necessary funding for the purchase, and more importantly to furnish the orphanage, members were urged to “buy” a brick or a yard of turf at a cost of one shilling (5p.) each. They were presented with a numbered certificate to commemorate their purchase, although it was not intended as a deed of ownership. Since Grove House is built of stone and not bricks, could it be that this is where our present Grand Secretary learnt the art of parting members from their money? Occasionally these certificates are produced today by the descendants of donors in the hope that there may be some monetary value to the estate of the member.

Grove House orphanage was officially opened on Easter Monday, 1927 by the Lord Mayor of London and the parade of members took three hours to march from Harrogate Railway Station with four brass bands. In those days the Railway Station was not at its current location, but was situated on the Leeds Road, not too far from the present Prince of Wales round about.

The Grand Lodge Offices moved into Grove House in 1926, having previously occupied the living room of Brother Wilson-Marsh in Cheltenham (Gloucestershire). He is the third (and last!) Grand Secretary to have been expelled from the Order. At first the offices were accommodated in the Drawing room, which now provides a combination of three rooms – (bedroom 3, a filing room and for the Grand Secretary’s secretarial staff). The present single storey office extension along Skipton Road was built in 1933 and was intended at a later date to have a second and third floor added for extra dormitory accommodation for the orphanage. This addition has not, to date, taken place.

Grove House Orphanage operated from 1926 until Christmas 1947 even though some Army units were stationed here during World War II (1939-1945). With the introduction of the new “welfare state” that would look after the population from the ‘cradle to the grave’ widows and other guardians were, understandably, reluctant to be parted from their children. The Order changed its policy by returning the children to their families and provided cash benefits to enable the children to be looked after at their home.

Trafalgar, the original Harrogate Convalescent Home in Valley Drive, was closed and Grove House adapted to become a convalescent home for members of the Order only, providing rest, recuperation and a change of air. In 1966 to mark the Centenary of the Grand Lodge of England, Grove House was adapted to provide permanent residential care for aged members without family or dependants. In 1980 the female dependants of members were admitted as convalescent patients. In 1983 Convention agreed that joint member and spouse convalescent applicants were to be admitted to Grove House. The same year Grand Lodge approved the necessary motion that allowed the Trustee’s to accept fee-paying guests into the Home, with a view to augmenting the upkeep and maintenance costs.



This Bedroom is believed to have been occupied by Prince Albert, son of Queen Victoria

During major repair work to the roof on the east wing in 1998/9 it became necessary to remove a considerable amount of weight from the roof and to rebuild much of the parapet wall. When the roof void was opened a number of ornate plaster panels in deep relief were discovered from the ceiling of the former art gallery. Rather than risk being destroyed, they were carefully removed and re-sited in the Lesser Hall, the Grand Staircase and first floor landing.



Four of the panels rescued from the East wing renovations

Closer examination of the four oblong panels in the Lesser Hall reveals the formation of a number of dragons, rampant acting as supporters for the central bust, not too different from those in the glass screen at the east entrance. Is it possible, even remotely, that these panels also came from the Dragon Hotel? And therefore are much older than 1890's when the east wing was built? The Harrogate Museum has put a conservative value on these

panels in the sum of £40,000 in their present condition.

The gallery housed a collection (possible one of the largest in England at the time) by the polish artist Bukovac. This artist is rapidly becoming increasingly important in the international art world.

Bukovac's, portrait of Samson Fox CE JP, hangs on the first floor landing, adjacent to the Council Chamber at the Harrogate Council Offices. A request to the Council Offices reception staff may result with an opportunity to view it.



Samson Fox, C.E. J.P. Reproduced by permission of the Harrogate Borough Council

The most recent alterations have been to convert the ten single bed rooms in the east wing to twin bedded "en suite" rooms, together with an additional twin bedded "en suite" room adjacent to the first floor

T.V. Lounge, at a cost of around £180,000 and it now means that every room, apart from three, are all twin bedded and “en suite.”

The east wing alterations have been dedicated to the memory of the late Brother Terrance E. Guy, R.O.H. a former P.G. Secretary of the Frome and Warminster Province, following the receipt from his sister of a gift to the Convalescent Homes fund of £50,000 to perpetrate his memory

Future planning is intended to increase the size of the dining room, so that everyone can dine at one sitting, and possibly allow for additional bedrooms to be brought into use.



The present Dining room

In a period of less than 247 years the role of Grove House has come full circle; an establishment for the sick and infirm to rest and recuperate, to an establishment for

the educational needs of children. As a country mansion, to an Army Hospital to an orphanage, as a holiday home, a placement for aged members to live out their declining years and a Convalescent Home for members and their dependants to rest and recuperate from illness or hospitalisation.



The former Billiard room now adapted for use as a Lodge Room

Grove House being the first major purchase by the Order and of which it can be immensely proud, is a building which is part of the country’s heritage, as well as that of the Order and can confidently meet all of the requirements of our members and their dependants well into the 21st. Century.

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