



British Steel

Underbank Hall.

Business and
Pleasure Combined



UNDERBANK
HALL

Set in the wild and beautiful Yorkshire countryside, Underbank Hall has been a silent observer of five centuries of life.



Underbank Hall

Underbank Hall was acquired from Michael West de Wend Fenton in 1959 and now British Steel Engineering Steels use it as a conference centre and a guest house for visiting VIP's. The coat of arms above the front door shows how the Hall has been passed down over many years as families combined.

Since 1480 Underbank Hall had been owned by the West family, and it is interesting to note that the Hearth Tax Returns (a sort of Property Tax) for 1672 show Steven West having no fewer than five hearths at Underbank Hall. This was quite a status symbol for the time, bearing in mind that the otherwise more prestigious and altogether bigger Broomhead Hall at nearby Bolsterstone only boasted two hearths!





*New perspectives,
changing views...*



Underbank changed hands in the 17th century when Frances West and her husband, William Fenton of Leeds, a big game-hunter, came to live there. There is on record a rather quaint custom of the early 18th Century which involved Mr. Fenton. The 1722 Martinmas rental of Captain Bosville's Estate shows that Mr. Fenton paid a "peppercorn" rent of one red rose for the privilege of Turbary (i.e. the right to cut turf or peat for fuel) in Langsett.

The hall was occupied in the name of Fenton until, in 1839, William's great-great-grand daughter, Jessey, married Major James Douglas de Wend, and introduced a third family name.

Their son, William de Wend, assumed his mother's maiden name in addition to his own, and the de Wend Fenton line continued with Michael West de Wend Fenton.

The Fentons were probably the first family locally to exploit on a large scale the valuable mineral resources (coal, fireclay, ganister) which were to be found in the Stocksbridge Valley - the very minerals which ultimately helped to sustain South Yorkshire's steelmaking industries.

Underbank Hall

Michael West de Wend Fenton eventually sold Underbank Hall to Samuel Fox & Company Ltd., the company then owning the local steelworks, which has been the area's major employer since 1842. The price was £4,300.

Although Underbank Hall looks relatively small from the outside, it is easy once inside to lose all sense of direction in the tight cluster of bedrooms.

Redecorated in keeping with the original style, the six bedrooms have their own individual character. Some have the original glass still in the windows, while one bedroom in the oldest wing has delightful latticed windows. Many of the bedrooms in this part of the house have floors that have assumed a slope with age.



The downstairs rooms have changed little over the centuries. However, at one time visitors would be welcomed, on entering, by the sight of a roaring fire in the hearth of the great hall. Now the hall has been converted into a dining room and a separate vestibule. Proof is provided by the oak panelling, which continues from the dining room into the vestibule, bearing the date 1594.

The prime features of the dining room are the huge fireplace and the beautiful oak furniture, which are steeped in the atmosphere of "Old England".



It is the "long" sitting room that guests to Underbank Hall will perhaps remember most. A comfortable room, it is conducive to stimulating business discussion which on occasions continues well into the small hours. The picture above the fireplace, depicting a forging hearth, is obviously significant to the steel industry, and is interesting in that it is painted on wood.

There is also a small back room or "snug" where one can relax in a comfortable armchair to watch television.





It would be unusual for a house with such a long and illustrious heritage to remain unhaunted. And indeed, some claim there is an atmosphere in the house that indicates a supernatural influence - particularly in the upstairs rooms.

That a ghost exists is an issue constantly in dispute, but those who are convinced tell the tale of a monk whose spirit still inhabits Underbank Hall, although the man died hundreds of years ago.

Differing versions of the tale exist, but there may be basis for them in fact.

From the 13th century, two Religious Orders of Monks - the Cistercians and the Cluniacs - owned land around Langsett which was farmed by lay brothers to the orders.

The expertise of the Cistercians, in particular, with their great abbeys at Jervaulx, Kirkstall and Rievaulx, was responsible for establishing Yorkshire's upland sheep farming tradition and England's important wool industry of the Middle Ages.

When the monastic orders in the UK were dissolved by order of King Henry VIII, the monks and lay brothers were forced out of their properties and many were obliged to become itinerant beggars.

One version of the ghost tale is that an itinerant monk passed Underbank Hall and was offered accommodation for the night. Pleased with his surroundings, the monk asked to stay on at the hall indefinitely, provided he worked in the garden to pay for his board and lodging.

Given the real facts behind the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, it is quite likely that lay brothers from the grange farms at Langsett would be looking for work thereafter. One of them is quite likely to be "the itinerant monk" who came to Underbank.

The story goes that the man spent the remainder of his days working at Underbank, but when he died he was laid to rest in unhallowed ground, and the ghost is his restless spirit.

Sightings of this ghost have been vague and inconclusive, but all claims concur in the form he assumes. He appears as a grey shadow to some, whilst others have experienced a sensation of being watched but have seen nothing. Often footsteps are heard coming to and fro, as if searching continually for something, although, again, nothing has been seen. Fortunately for those who experience it, the "presence" is quite harmless.

Visitors to the house are captivated by its inherent charm and tranquility, which it is hoped you will experience and enjoy during your stay at Underbank Hall.

